



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	03/09 Retail exodus from Russia is on
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/business/russia-ukraine-retail.html
GIST	<p>On Monday, the chief financial officer of Stanley Black & Decker told investors that the company was still figuring out whether it was going to keep its business in Russia given new sanctions affecting the country, or exit in coming weeks or months.</p> <p>“That’s something we’re watching very closely to see how it plays out,” Don Allan, the company’s chief financial officer, said at a conference. The business, with about 100 employees, brought in \$150 million in annual revenue, he said, and the company had an estimated \$30 million to \$40 million in inventory there. Less than 24 hours later, the company said it had decided to close.</p> <p>A growing number of American and European brands and retailers are changing their operations in Russia in response to the country’s invasion of Ukraine, with mass chains and luxury brands closing stores and halting other business in the country. The actions are affecting hundreds of stores and thousands of Russian employees.</p> <p>Last week, Apple, H&M Group, Nike, Ikea, LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, Hermès and Chanel said they would temporarily close stores in Russia. This week, Levi Strauss & Company and Adidas said they were also stopping sales in the country. On Tuesday, McDonald’s and Starbucks said they would temporarily close their hundreds of stores in Russia.</p> <p>Retailers are concerned about the reputational damage of doing business in Russia, but they’re also responding to practical challenges imposed by sanctions and the rapid decline in the value of the Russian ruble, said Tahlia Townsend, a partner and co-chair of the international trade compliance group at Wiggin & Dana.</p> <p>“The sanctions on banks in particular have made it very difficult to get money into Russia to pay employees or pay utilities, landlords, suppliers,” she said. “It’s not straightforward to get money back out of Russia, and so even if they can be paid for their goods they may not be able to then consolidate that revenue back into the United States or wherever else they’re headquartered.”</p> <p>Most major retailers have said they would continue to pay employees in Russia. A few, like Levi’s, specified that they would pay staff in local currency. It is not clear how those plans may be affected if the crisis continues for months and companies deplete their funds in the country.</p> <p>Retailers are not just halting sales and imports and exports. Ikea, with 15,000 employees in Russia and its ally, Belarus, has paused production of wooden furniture. TJX, the owner of T.J. Maxx and Marshalls, said it would divest its 25 percent stake in Familia, an off-price retailer with more than 400 stores in Russia, which it acquired for \$225 million in 2019. The carrying value of its Familia investment had fallen to \$186 million as of Jan. 29, based on the valuation of Russian rubles to U.S. dollars, according to its filing. Adidas also suspended its partnership with the Russian Football Union.</p> <p>The shutdown of Western businesses and the inability to buy simple goods like American-made jeans or Swedish-made furniture may set off alarm bells for Russians, who are facing a walled-off digital state under President Vladimir V. Putin, according to Anna Nagurney, a professor in the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts.</p> <p>“It’s a way of telling people that something is very wrong,” she said. “You begin to wonder like, what’s happening, what’s going on? Can you imagine that, you go to one store or another and can’t transact. That’s going to create a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty.”</p> <p>Still, other academics contend that the shutdowns from American and European retailers may feed into Mr. Putin’s narrative about Western countries.</p>

“It’s completely consistent with what Putin is telling them,” said Tymofiy Mylovanov, president of the Kyiv School of Economics. “It’s sending the message that the West is nasty.”

The actions taken by luxury brands have been particularly closely watched, especially after a [Bloomberg News report on March 2 that wealthy Russians](#) were racing to buy jewelry and watches to help preserve the value of their savings. Bulgari’s chief executive officer told the news outlet that sales at Russian stores had increased in the prior days and that the invasion of Ukraine, which began Feb. 24, had “probably boosted the business.” He added that the brand was “there for the Russian people and not for the political world.”

Bulgari is owned by LVMH, which is estimated to have more than 120 stores in Russia and which closed them effective Sunday. Prada and Kering also said they would temporarily shut their shops.

Still, the brands received criticism on social media for what some saw as their tepid response. Several people criticized Hermès for its [store closing post](#) on LinkedIn, which said the brand was “deeply concerned by the situation in Europe at this time.” They said Hermès should have referred directly to the war and named Ukraine in the post.

Ms. Townsend said luxury brands might also be nervous about selling in Russia because, increasingly, many of the wealthiest people in the country [were subject to sanctions](#).

“Typically, when you go in to spend a lot of money on a very expensive luxury brand, you don’t expect the store to take your passport and see if you’re on a sanctions list,” she said. “If they were to do that, they may lose customers.”

The escalating crisis coincided with a string of fashion shows in Milan and Paris this month, events that not long ago had front rows heavily populated with the young wives of oligarchs, who were lauded as influencers and proved catnip for photographers.

Now nearly all luxury executives were quick to say their main concern was for their employees in Russia, rather than to condemn the Russian government’s actions. Over the last week, however, designers moved from refraining from any comment to almost universally — and publicly — professing their support for peace in the form of voice-overs at shows or addenda to their show notes.

Most major retailers and brands, including Ikea and Apple, have announced donations to aid Ukrainian people driven from their homes by the conflict. At the Givenchy show, a note left on every seat stated that the brand had made a donation to the Ukrainian Red Cross and offered a QR code for guests to donate, too. At Stella McCartney, the show notes said that the brand was “dedicated to the people affected by the war in Ukraine,” and that it had donated to emergency crisis support for Ukrainians.

Both brands are owned by LVMH, though the biggest runway statement was made by Balenciaga, which is owned by Kering: A giant T-shirt in the colors of the Ukrainian flag was placed on every seat, along with a personal statement by the designer, Demna, who had fled Georgia as a child. Salma Hayek Pinault promptly donned her T-shirt, and her husband, Francois-Henri Pinault, the chief executive of Kering, draped his over his shoulders.

[The show itself](#), which featured models clutching garbage bags and trudging into a snowstorm, was the only one to directly confront the plight of refugees. There was some criticism of the designer on social media, however, for dramatizing the ravages of war in what is, in the end, a commercial context.

Still, not everyone in the industry is leaving Russia.

Speaking before his fall 2022 show in Paris, the designer Rick Owens said that he hadn’t fully figured out what to do, but that he did not think the Russian people “deserved to be punished.”

Uniqlo, owned by the clothing giant Fast Retailing, plans to [keep its Russian stores open](#), with its founder, Tadashi Yanai, telling a Japanese newspaper: "Clothing is a necessity of life. The people of Russia have the same right to live as we do."

Experts anticipate that the void left by Western retail businesses will be filled by China, which is likely to work to cater to Russia's middle class and benefit in the short term. And some non-Russian retailers may route their goods through China to bypass Europe.

"China is perfectly capable of mimicking brands, even I.T. brands, and it's a greatly grown economy," said Mr. Mylovanov, who is also a former minister of economic development in Ukraine. People may be "sort of annoyed" that they can't get American and European brands, but they'll likely hang on to what they own and hope that they can travel to buy such goods in the future, he said.

For most American and European retailers, their business in Russia is not so big that its loss will leave a major dent in earnings. Levi's, for example, [said that only](#) 4 percent of its net sales came from Eastern Europe, and that only half of that was tied to Russia. Stanley Black & Decker said its sales and inventory in Russia suggested that the conflict wasn't "a big risk" for the company. At Dries Van Noten, where Axel Keller, the brand's president, said they had paused deliveries to Russia, Ukraine, Russia and Belarus together account for just 6 percent of revenue.

Companies that want to return to doing business in the country "don't want to offend Russian sensibilities," Ms. Townsend of Wiggin & Dana said. But, she added, "for many companies, the market outside of Russia is more important than the market inside Russia, and they want to be on the right side of the moral decision."

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HEADLINE	03/10 AAA: impact rising gas prices vary by age
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/03/10/gas-prices-rise-record-average-aaa/8551646915777/
GIST	<p>March 10 (UPI) -- A large number of American drivers say that gas prices rising above an average of \$4 will force them to make changes to their habits and lifestyles, such as driving less and cutting out entertainment and shopping.</p> <p>AAA said Thursday that more than half of U.S. drivers said they would make changes if the average cost of gas rose above \$4 per gallon -- and about three-quarters said they would do so if it rose to over \$5.</p> <p>AAA said earlier this week that the national average in the United States is \$4.17 per gallon -- the highest mark on record. On Thursday, AAA put the national average even higher -- about \$4.32 per gallon.</p> <p>Several factors are behind the rise in prices, including inflation related to post-COVID-19 economic recovery and the Russian war in Ukraine.</p> <p>The impact of the higher gas prices vary among U.S. drivers by age. AAA said 18- to 34-year-olds are almost three times as likely to consider carpooling than those over 35. Drivers over 35 are more likely to combine trips and errands and cut down shopping and dining out with the higher prices.</p> <p>AAA said that while many are recoiling due to the more expensive gas, it doesn't expect the higher prices to have a significant impact on summer travel in the coming months. It said a recent survey showed that 52% of Americans have plans to take a vacation this summer -- and 42% said they wouldn't change travel plans regardless of the price of gas.</p> <p>"Since the New Year, the national average has continued a steady climb due to strained supply and increased demand but Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February caused oil prices to spike further," AAA said in a statement. "And in the 14 days since the conflict began, the national average has risen \$0.70.</p>

	<p>"These are numbers not seen at the pump since the financial crisis in 2008."</p> <p>The most expensive gas is found in the West. California has the nation's most expensive gas, by far, at almost \$5.70 per gallon -- followed by Nevada (\$4.87), Hawaii (\$4.81), Oregon (\$4.72) and Washington (\$4.70).</p> <p>The least expensive gas in the United States is found in the Midwest. Kansas has the least expensive gas at \$3.82 per gallon, followed by Missouri (\$3.85), Oklahoma (\$3.85), South Dakota (\$3.89) and Arkansas (\$3.90).</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 US citizens seek to fight for Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/headline/russia-ukraine-war-foreign-fighters/2022/03/10/id/1060506/
GIST	<p>Russia's invasion of Ukraine has given the smaller nation's embassy in Washington an unexpected role: recruitment center for Americans who want to join the fight.</p> <p>Diplomats working out of the embassy, in a townhouse in the Georgetown section of the city, are fielding thousands of offers from volunteers seeking to fight for Ukraine, even as they work on the far more pressing matter of securing weapons to defend against an increasingly brutal Russian onslaught.</p> <p>"They really feel that this war is unfair, unprovoked," said Ukraine's military attaché, Maj. Gen. Borys Kremenetskyi. "They feel that they have to go and help."</p> <p>U.S. volunteers represent just a small subset of foreigners seeking to fight for Ukraine, who in turn comprise just a tiny fraction of the international assistance that has flowed into the country. Still, it is a reflection of the passion, supercharged in an era of social media, that the attack and the mounting civilian casualties have stirred.</p> <p>"This is not mercenaries who are coming to earn money," Kremenetskyi said. "This is people of goodwill who are coming to assist Ukraine to fight for freedom."</p> <p>The U.S. government discourages Americans from going to fight in Ukraine, which raises legal and national security issues.</p> <p>Since the Feb. 24 invasion, the embassy in Washington has heard from at least 6,000 people inquiring about volunteering for service, the "vast majority" of them American citizens, said Kremenetskyi, who oversees the screening of potential U.S. recruits.</p> <p>Half the potential volunteers were quickly rejected and didn't even make it to the Zoom interview, the general said. They lacked the required military experience, had a criminal background or weren't suitable for other reasons such as age, including a 16-year-old boy and a 73-year-old man.</p> <p>Some who expressed interest were rejected because the embassy said it couldn't do adequate vetting. The general didn't disclose the methods used to screen people.</p> <p>Kremenetskyi, who spoke to The Associated Press just after returning from the Pentagon for discussions on the military hardware his country needs for its defense, said he appreciates the support from both the U.S. government and the public.</p> <p>"Russians can be stopped only with hard fists and weapons," he said.</p> <p>So far, about 100 U.S. citizens have made the cut. They include veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with combat experience, including some helicopter pilots, the attaché said.</p>

They must make their own way to Poland, where they are to cross at a specified point, with their own protective gear but without a weapon, which they will get after they arrive. They will be required to sign a contract to serve, without pay, in the International Legion for the Territorial Defense of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian government says about 20,000 foreigners from various nations have already joined.

Borys Wrzesnewskyj, a former Liberal lawmaker in Canada who is helping to facilitate recruitment there, said about 1,000 Canadians have applied to fight for Ukraine, the vast majority of whom don't have any ties to the country.

"The volunteers, a very large proportion are ex-military, these are people that made that tough decision that they would enter the military to stand up for the values that we subscribe to," Wrzesnewskyj said. "And when they see what is happening in Ukraine they can't stand aside."

It's not clear how many U.S. citizens seeking to fight have actually reached Ukraine, a journey the State Department has urged people not to make.

"We've been very clear for some time, of course, in calling on Americans who may have been resident in Ukraine to leave, and making clear to Americans who may be thinking of traveling there not to go," Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters recently.

U.S. citizens aren't required to register overseas. The State Department says it's not certain how many have entered Ukraine since the Russian invasion.

Under some circumstances, Americans could face criminal penalties, or even risk losing their citizenship, by taking part in an overseas conflict, according to a senior federal law enforcement official.

But the legal issues are only one of many concerns for U.S. authorities, who worry about what could happen if an American is killed or captured or is recruited while over there to work for a foreign intelligence service upon their return home, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive security matters.

The official and independent security experts say some of the potential foreign fighters may be white supremacists, who are believed to be fighting on both sides of the conflict. They could become more radicalized and gain military training in Ukraine, thereby posing an increased danger when they return home.

"These are men who want adventure, a sense of significance and are harking back to World War II rhetoric," said Anne Speckhard, who has extensively studied foreigners who fought in Syria and elsewhere as director of the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism.

Ukraine may be getting around some of the potential legal issues by only facilitating the overseas recruitment, and directing volunteers to sign their contracts, and receive a weapon, once they arrive in the country. Also, by assigning them to the territorial defense forces, and not front-line units, it reduces the chance of direct combat with Russians, though it's by no means eliminated.

The general acknowledges the possibility that any foreigners who are captured could be used for propaganda purposes. But he didn't dwell on the issue, focusing instead on the need for his country to defend itself against Russia.

"We are fighting for our existence," he said. "We are fighting for our families, for our land. And we are not going to give up."

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HEADLINE	03/09 WHO warns: pandemic far from over
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/two-years-warns-pandemic-far-163730799.html

GIST

The pandemic is far from over, the WHO's leader insisted Wednesday, two years after he first used the term to wake the world up to the emerging threat of Covid-19.

The World Health Organization's director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus first described Covid-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020.

Two years on, he lamented how the virus was still evolving and surging in some parts of the world.

The WHO declared a public health emergency of international concern -- the highest level of alarm in the UN health agency's regulations -- on January 30, 2020, when, outside of China, fewer than 100 cases and no deaths had been reported.

But it was only the use of the word pandemic six weeks on that seemed to shake many countries into action.

"Two years later, more than six million people have died," Tedros told a press conference, while nearly 444 million cases have been registered.

"Although reported cases and deaths are declining globally, and several countries have lifted restrictions, the pandemic is far from over -- and it will not be over anywhere until it's over everywhere."

He noted the 46-percent rise in new cases last week in the WHO's Western Pacific region, where 3.9 million infections were recorded.

"The virus continues to evolve, and we continue to face major obstacles in distributing vaccines, tests and treatments everywhere they are needed," Tedros said.

He also sounded a warning on the recent plunge in testing rates, saying it left the planet blind to what Covid-19 was up to.

"WHO is concerned that several countries are drastically reducing testing," Tedros said.

"This inhibits our ability to see where the virus is, how it's spreading and how it's evolving."

- Call for vigilance -

The number of fresh cases fell five percent worldwide last week compared to the week before, while the number of deaths dropped eight percent.

However, Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's Covid-19 technical lead, warned that the case rate was certainly an underestimate due the dramatic drop-off in testing.

"The virus is still spreading at far too intensive a level, three years into this pandemic," she said.

"Even though we are seeing declining trends... there were still more than 10 million reported cases reported at a global level last week.

"We have to remain vigilant."

In its weekly update on the spread of the virus, the WHO said earlier that the Omicron variant had "global dominance" over other mutations of the virus.

The WHO said Omicron accounted for 99.7 percent of samples collected in the last 30 days that have been sequenced and uploaded to the GISAID global science initiative.

	<p>The WHO says unequal access to Covid-19 vaccines, tests and treatments remains rampant and is prolonging the pandemic.</p> <p>On jabs, the WHO's latest figures show 23 countries are yet to fully immunise 10 percent of their populations, while 73 countries are yet to achieve the 40 percent coverage target set for the start of 2022.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 China promotes Russia disinformation
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/10/china/china-russia-disinformation-campaign-ukraine-intl-dst-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>Beijing (CNN)In public statements and at international summits, Chinese officials have attempted to stake out a seemingly neutral position on the war in Ukraine, neither condemning Russian actions nor ruling out the possibility Beijing could act as a mediator in a push for peace.</p> <p>But while its international messaging has kept many guessing as to Beijing's true intentions, much of its domestic media coverage of Russia's invasion tells a wholly different story.</p> <p>There, an alternate reality is playing out for China's 1.4 billion people, one in which the invasion is nothing more than a "special military operation," according to its national broadcaster CCTV; the United States may be funding a biological weapons program in Ukraine, and Russian President Vladimir Putin is a victim standing up for a beleaguered Russia.</p> <p>To tell that story, major state-run news media outlets -- which dominate China's highly censored media space -- have been largely echoing Russian state media stories or information from Russian officials.</p> <p>A CNN analysis reviewed nearly 5,000 social media posts from 14 Chinese state media outlets during the first eight days of Russia's invasion posted onto China's Twitter-like platform, Weibo. The analysis found that of the more than 300 most-shared posts about the events in Ukraine -- which were each shared more than 1,000 times -- almost half, about 140, were what CNN classified as distinctly pro-Russian, often containing information attributed to a Russian official or picked up directly from Russia's state media.</p> <p>The analysis, which focused on stories that got the most play on social media, may not be representative of all posts shared by state media outlets on Weibo. But it provides a snapshot of the state media-produced information that is most visible to the more than half a billion monthly users on the popular platform.</p> <p>It's not clear the extent to which these posts may be explicitly the result of a coordinated propaganda campaign between the two countries, but it is consistent with an ongoing pattern in which Russian and Chinese media have amplified and reinforced their often-interchangeable talking points on issues such as the treatment of Russian dissidents, Hong Kong pro-democracy protests, the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic, or the supposed American role in fomenting "color revolutions" against authoritarian regimes.</p> <p>Such mutual reinforcement has also spilled over into the extensive overseas and English-language propaganda operations that both countries have built to promote their views globally -- a route made more important with Russia's state media outlets being banned on air and online in parts of the West.</p> <p>In China's top-down government-controlled media environment, all state-affiliated content is vetted and issued in accordance with government directives. That China has chosen to follow Russia's lead in deliberately mischaracterizing the war only serves to underline Beijing's closeness to Moscow -- and almost makes a mockery of China's self-proclaimed impartiality in helping to engage with Russia and bring an end to the violence.</p> <p>The playbook</p> <p>Russian assurances that civilian sites will not be targeted -- despite extensive evidence to the contrary, descriptions of Ukrainian soldiers using "Nazi" tactics, and misinformation regarding the whereabouts of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky are all stories that have been funneled from Russian sources into</p>

China's [enclosed social media ecosystem](#) -- where many Western news outlets are blocked -- by its state media outlets in recent days.

That dynamic was at play on Monday morning, when China's state broadcaster CCTV released a package in its morning newscast highlighting Moscow's erroneous claim that Washington had funded the development of biological weapons in Ukrainian labs. That insinuation is used to support the narrative that Ukraine -- characterized by Moscow as an American puppet state -- threatens Russia, and not the other way around.

The source? Russian Defense Ministry Spokesman Igor Konashenkov, who on Sunday said Russian forces uncovered "evidence" of the "hasty measures to conceal any traces of the military biological program finance(d) by the US Department of Defense," and referenced documents he said detailed the destruction of hazardous pathogens at these facilities on the order of the Ukrainian Health Ministry.

In a statement on Twitter Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki pushed back on "Russia's false claims about alleged US biological weapons labs and chemical weapons development in Ukraine" and noted the "echoing" of those "conspiracy theories" by Chinese officials.

"This is preposterous. It's the kind of disinformation operation we've seen repeatedly from the Russians over the years in Ukraine and in other countries, which have been debunked, and an example of the types of false pretexts we have been warning the Russians would invent," Psaki said, adding that the US was "in full compliance" with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention and "does not develop or possess such weapons anywhere."

"Now that Russia has made these false claims, and China has seemingly endorsed this propaganda, we should all be on the lookout for Russia to possibly use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine, or to create a false flag operation using them. It's a clear pattern," Psaki said.

The subject was also raised in a Senate hearing on Tuesday, when Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland, asked if Ukraine had biological weapons, said it has biological research facilities, which the US was concerned Russian forces may be seeking to control.

"We are working with the Ukrainians on how they can prevent any of those research materials from falling into the hands of Russian forces, should they approach," Nuland said.

Minutes after the CCTV report aired, an affiliated news outlet released an online post repeating the claims from Russia's Defense Ministry and started a related hashtag on Weibo, which began trending. The hashtag was viewed more than 45 million times over a period of hours that day.

The next day, after Russia doubled down on the biological weapons claims with further statements, without evidence, CCTV released a new television segment, which was again shared by prominent state media outlets on Weibo, gaining further traction.

The story then moved into the narrative of China's officials when a state media reporter at a regular Foreign Ministry press briefing asked a question about the laboratories, prompting the spokesperson to read a lengthy prepared response that repeated Russian disinformation.

"We once again urge the US to fully clarify its biological militarization activities both inside and outside its borders and accept multilateral verification," spokesperson Zhao Lijian said.

Within hours, at least 17 state media outlets, including CCTV, Xinhua, and the People's Daily, posted Zhao's response on Weibo, where the topic racked up more than 210 million views. A related hashtag rose to be the top trending topic on Weibo by the following afternoon.

The pattern is just one example of a playbook that enables China to cover the war through the lens of Russian rhetoric and disinformation. Other examples include stories, such as repeated false claims that

Zelensky fled the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv -- sourced to a single Russian lawmaker, which were picked up and amplified by both Chinese and Russian state media outlets on their domestic and international platforms.

A CNN analysis sought to understand how large a role such stories play in China's tightly controlled media ecosystem, first by combing through nearly 5,000 social media posts from the Weibo accounts of 14 of China's most influential state media outlets, focusing on the first eight days of the invasion and news about the events in Ukraine.

Next, CNN analyzed which of those posts were the most highly engaged with, identifying more than 300 posts shared on Weibo more than 1,000 times. Of those more than 300 posts, an analysis found that nearly half showed Russia in a positive light -- a category CNN defined as news sourced solely from Russian officials or Russian media, content that describes Ukraine negatively, misinformation about Zelensky, or pro-Putin coverage.

While about 140 posts showed Russia in a positive light, the analysis identified fewer than 15 posts that portrayed Ukraine positively.

A look at other characterizations showed only around 90 of these posts were neutral -- for example, purely factual reports from reliable sources, news about humanitarian aid or updates on the evacuation of Chinese citizens from Ukraine.

Just over a third were what CNN classified as anti-West or anti-US, for example: stories airing views that Russia was pushed to action in Ukraine by the expansion of NATO, or criticizing Western media coverage of the crisis.

CNN reporters classified some posts into more than one category. A look at the distribution shows posts that depicted Russia in a positive light were more frequent than any other category.

Because CNN only studied posts with high engagement, the findings may not be representative of all posts produced by state media.

China's Foreign Ministry has yet to respond to CNN's request for comment on these findings.

The backdrop

The findings contrast the apparent middle line that China has tried to walk in its international diplomacy. Though Beijing has [stood apart from the Western response](#) to Russia's invasion, with its diplomats refusing to condemn the invasion, or even call it such, and decrying Western sanctions, it has also frequently repeated that "all countries' legitimate security concerns" should be addressed.

In a virtual summit with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Tuesday, Chinese leader Xi Jinping called for negotiations to bring about "peaceful outcomes" and stressed China's promises to contribute humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

"There is a difference between the way China talks to the international audience and the way it talks to the domestic audience ... for the domestic audience, it's important to preserve this partnership with Russia, because that's a political priority for Xi," said Alexander Gabuev, a senior fellow and the chair of the Russia in the Asia-Pacific Program at the Carnegie Moscow Center.

He points to the increasingly close [relationship between China and Russia](#) in recent years, a strategic partnership strengthened, in part, by shared friction with the West.

"So (China's leaders) need to shape public perceptions about this, and explain why dealing with Russia is morally justified or is the right thing to do -- and (China's media coverage) serves this purpose," he said.

A glimpse into how China may seek to control its coverage was given in the days prior to the invasion, when an internal directive that was apparently accidentally shared on social media showed Chinese state media outlet Beijing News ordered its employees not to publish news reports that were "negative about Russia or pro-West." Beijing News did not respond to requests for comment.

Maria Repnikova, director of the Center for Global Information Studies at Georgia State University, said Russia-leaning coverage was in line with historical precedent: "Stories that are critical of Russia or are portraying Russia in an unfavorable manner are generally censored," she said.

"As a result of that, it is expedient to use Russian state media sources because they're the ones portraying the (Ukraine) conflict with a more favorable eye or view from the Russian perspective," she said.

Another sign of this has been which voices have been allowed to thrive on China's heavily censored social media platforms in the wake of the invasion. There, pro-Russia and anti-Western, nationalistic voices have also dominated, while there has been a suppression of pro-Ukrainian or anti-war messages on platforms and across the media landscape.

One glaring example came Friday, when CCTV broadcast a speech from International Paralympic Committee President Andrew Parsons, at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Paralympic Games, in which many parts of the speech were muffled and were not translated.

The offending context? Parsons' "message of peace," in which he did not name Russia or Ukraine but said he was "horrified at what is taking place in the world."

Those voices from within China who have tried to speak up -- including five history professors who penned an open letter voicing their strong opposition to "Russia's war against Ukraine" -- have seen their posts swiftly deleted or social accounts suspended.

"We have seen alternative, critical voices -- some subtle critique or attempts to present scenes from the war zone and talk about humanity and empathy toward Ukraine -- (but) a lot of these messages have been censored," said Repnikova.

Social media platforms in China have taken action against [extremist nationalist voices](#) in recent weeks, with Sina Weibo "punishing" around 75 accounts and screening out more than 1,500 posts and video-streaming platform Douyin removing over 6,000 illegal videos, according to the Global Times. But the nationalistic voices that have dominated social media platforms fall in line with what Repnikova describes as "a significant spike in digital nationalism, (with) the US and the West (as) the key target of this nationalistic sentiment."

Break the monopoly

That nationalist sentiment -- fueled by a deep distrust of the US and concern about its role as the leading global power -- are a critical part of the glue that has firmed up the Russian and Chinese relationship in recent years.

It's also filtered in the kinds of media coverage that each have shared overseas, as both Russia and China have sought to deepen their propaganda efforts, launching social media-friendly news brands in English and other languages, like China's CGTN and RT (formerly Russia Today).

While experts say it's unclear if top media officials from the two countries are discussing news coverage at an operational level and some official coordination is more symbolic in nature, there is a growing push in recent years for alignment and content-sharing.

A large Ukrainian flag with the slogan "We Stand With Ukraine" written on it in Chinese characters is seen on the outside wall of the Canadian Embassy on March 1, 2022 in Beijing, China.

	<p>A number of content-sharing arrangements exist between Chinese and Russian media outlets, and the shared vision is clear: these outlets together can "break the monopoly of Western media," as a Global Times report on a China-Russia media forum in 2015 put it.</p> <p>Fast-forward to the crisis in Ukraine and the upside of that collaboration, for one partner anyway, is clear. In the European Union, Kremlin-backed media outlets RT and Sputnik were officially banned as of last Wednesday, with companies like Meta, parent of Facebook and Instagram, and Google's YouTube stepping in to block their content.</p> <p>But, on China's channels like CGTN and Global Times, which continue to operate, those Russian talking points are still getting through.</p> <p>Already this week, posts from those accounts have suggested Ukraine and the US have pro-Nazi leanings, repeated Russian misinformation on the laboratories, and cited Russia denying that it plans to overthrow the existing government in its "special military operation" in Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Putin less isolated outside the West
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/10/putin-india-brazil-south-africa-eritrea-belarus/
GIST	<p>In India, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has refrained from denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine, describing it as a gripe between Moscow and NATO. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro said his nation “will not take sides” in the conflict, even as he dismissed Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky as “a comedian.” A senior South African official still calls Russia “a friend through and through.”</p> <p>From a perch in the West, it’s easy to see a world standing against Russian President Vladimir Putin. As Russian forces lay brutal siege to Ukrainian cities, leaders in Washington and the capitals of Europe are slapping Moscow with sanction after sanction. In Western countries, Putin has come to be seen as a Bond villain caricature and antagonist to a heroic, beloved Zelensky. Even McDonald’s suspended operations in Russia. Surely you’re isolated if you can’t buy a Big Mac.</p> <p>There’s no question Putin has dug himself, and his nation, into a dangerous hole. Russian propaganda and censorship have severed its people from reality. Slammed by sanctions and cut off from a massive part of the global financial system, the Russian economy is withering. This week, Western countries hit Moscow’s vital energy sector. The ruble is turning to rubble.</p> <p>Look deeper, though, and the suggestion that Putin is isolated may still be something of a Western bias — an assumption based on a definition of the “world” as places of privilege, largely the United States, Europe, Canada, Australia and Japan. Of the 193 members of the United Nations, 141 voted to condemn Moscow’s unprovoked attack on its neighbor. But that majority vote doesn’t tell the more nuanced story.</p> <p>“There is a feeling [that] the level of support from a lot of non-Western countries for this resolution was quite thin,” said Richard Gowan, U.N. director at the International Crisis Group.</p> <p>Many countries in the developing world, including some of Russia’s closest allies, are unsettled by Putin’s breach of Ukrainian sovereignty. Yet the giants of the Global South — including India, Brazil and South Africa — are hedging their bets while China still publicly backs Putin. Even NATO-member Turkey is acting coy, moving to shut off the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits to all warships, not just the Russians.</p> <p>Just as Western onlookers often shrug at far-flung conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, some citizens in emerging economies are gazing at Ukraine and seeing themselves without a dog in this fight — and with compelling national interests for not alienating Russia. In a broad swath of the developing world, the Kremlin’s talking points are filtering into mainstream news and social media. But even more measured</p>

assessments portray Ukraine as not the battle royal between good and evil being witnessed by the West, but a Machiavellian tug of war between Washington and Moscow.

We “should keep an equal distance from both imperial powers,” wrote columnist Fuat Bol in [Turkey's Hürriyet](#).

The dithering over Putin echoes the nonaligned movement during the Cold War, of countries that sought middle ground between dueling superpowers. But the gulf between the West and the Global South may also be worsening during the pandemic and the era of climate change, as developing nations grow increasingly resentful of the self-interested responses in the United States and Europe.

“There are a growing number of countries that are more willing to assert their independence in spite of the fact that they aspire to closer cooperation with the West and are even in need of Western support,” said Chris Landsberg, a professor of international relations at the University of Johannesburg. “They are willing to send the message that they don’t take kindly to the idea of being boxed in and forced to choose” sides.

Unwillingness to denounce Putin does not necessarily translate into determination to help him. Last week, the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank [suspended](#) all business with Russia. New Development Bank, a multilateral lender set up by the BRICS countries — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — “[in light](#) of unfolding uncertainties and restrictions” put new transactions with Russia on hold.

Most importantly, the extent of China’s backing for Putin, whom Chinese leader Xi Jinping met with in Beijing nearly three weeks before the invasion, remains a wild card. Amid fallout that China surely did not want — a more assertive Japan, a splintering global economy — Xi’s support for a new world order alongside Moscow has turned into a complex balancing act.

But Beijing has at least sought to preserve a certain pro-Russian sentiment at home. On the Chinese social media site Weibo — where the phrase “Russian invasion” is banned — the Nation [reported](#) that uses of the hashtag “Putin” and “Emperor Putin” have surged alongside memes of Putin riding a bear.

India refused to back U.N. resolutions denouncing the invasion, nodding to a strategic relationship that dates back to the Cold War. New Delhi sees Moscow as a counterbalance to China, and more than 60 percent of India’s weaponry comes from Russia. India struck a \$5.43 billion deal with Moscow in 2018 for the [S-400 missile system](#).

“Russia is one of the largest arms dealers in the world,” said Dan Runde, a foreign policy expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “The U.S. sells the Cadillacs of weapons, while Russia sells the Chevys.”

Under Modi, “India has responded to the invasion with the blunt realism of a rising, aspirational power that does not want to get caught between Russia and what Modi calls the ‘NATO group,’ ” the [International Crisis Group said in a new report](#).

South Africa was one 17 African countries to abstain from a U.N. resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, bowing to historical ties between the African National Congress, which led that nation’s struggle against the White minority government, and the Soviet Union. Two of South Africa’s post-apartheid presidents, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, underwent military training in the Soviet Union.

On Monday, Zuma — in a statement issued through his foundation — called Putin “a man of peace.”

“Russia is our friend through and through,” Lindiwe Zulu, South Africa’s minister of social development who studied in Moscow during the apartheid years, told the New York Times. “We are not about to denounce that relationship that we have always had.”

	<p>“We can neither give up on Ukraine nor on Russia,” declared Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Meanwhile, the Turkish press and public have echoed the false Kremlin narrative of Ukraine as a den of neo-Nazis, and turned a cynical eye on Europe’s warm welcome for Ukrainian refugees, as opposed to Syrians and Afghans, countless numbers of whom were stopped from entering the European Union and forced to seek refuge in Turkey.</p> <p>“The rulers of Ukraine have broken with their own history and have become puppets of NATO,” Ethem Sancak, a businessman and close ally of Erdogan, told the Russian press.</p> <p>Wrote Asli Aydintasbas, a senior fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, in The Washington Post: “A sense of strategic ambiguity seems to be at the heart of Turkey’s balancing act with Russia. ... Turkey is unwilling to antagonize Putin — at least not without a firm offer from the West.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 New iron curtain descends on Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/09/ukraine-russia-iron-curtain/
GIST	<p>An economic and cultural iron curtain is descending on Russia as President Vladimir Putin proceeds with his invasion of Ukraine, reversing decades of integration with Western economies and threatening to isolate Russians to an extent unseen since the Soviet era.</p> <p>The dramatic severing is the result of punishing restrictions put in place by the United States and Europe, including bans on Russian aircraft flying in Western airspace and sanctions on the central bank. It has been compounded by a voluntary exodus of international companies from the Russian market.</p> <p>But the isolation is also a function of the repressive measures Putin has taken at home. Those moves have curbed the free flow of information online, contained public protest and sent thousands of Russians fleeing abroad, fearing the possibility of martial law, conscription or closed borders in a country careening toward a more severe form of authoritarianism.</p> <p>“As Putin tries to reduce Ukraine to rubble, he is also turning Russia into a prison,” Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said during testimony to Congress on Tuesday.</p> <p>The result is the rise of a pariah state version of Russia, which has swiftly become a place many of its own citizens don’t even recognize — one where money is subject to capital controls; where the radio and television stations of the Russian intelligentsia no longer broadcast; where TikTok won’t accept video uploads; and where the Russian team can’t compete for the FIFA World Cup.</p> <p>Some supermarkets are even limiting the amount of flour and sugar customers can purchase, and shoppers are hoarding items from Ikea, H&M and Zara before they become relics of a bygone era. Hollywood studios are stopping the release of films, while Europe is no longer a nearby stomping ground but an ever-more-inaccessible universe, brimming with anger at Russians.</p> <p>“For the average person who is less economically integrated with the rest of the world, they are going to feel it first when it comes to prices. They are going to see things disappear from the shelves,” said Kristy Ironside, a historian at McGill University who focuses on Russia. “For the younger professional class, this is going to be devastating to them. Their lives are really going to change quickly.”</p> <p>As the ruble plummets and companies retreat, Russians won’t be able to get items they have become used to, and even if those items are available, many won’t be able to afford them, Ironside said.</p> <p>On Tuesday, even McDonald’s — a symbol of the Soviet Union’s opening to the West when it set up shop in Moscow in 1990 — announced that it would temporarily shut down its 850 restaurants in Russia, while still paying the chain’s 62,000 employees.</p>

Steps such as the closing of McDonald's and the blocking of Russian athletes from sporting competitions will make it clear to regular Russians that the invasion comes with a steep cost, even if Russia's state-controlled media hides the truth, said Konstantin Sonin, a Russian economist at the University of Chicago.

"For decades even rogue countries like North Korea and Iran participated in the Olympics and World Cups, and teams from the Soviet Union participated in European soccer cups even in the years of worst tensions," he said. "Now this is all gone. This is how Russian people know that something is going terribly wrong."

Putin has long presented his rule as a stable antidote to the economic turmoil and crime that afflicted Russia in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Significant increases in living standards during his first two terms fueled much of his popularity among Russians.

Russia entered the World Trade Organization and brought businesspeople every year to a Davos-like forum in St. Petersburg to tout the country as an enticing emerging market. Foreign car companies, retailers, restaurants and consumer goods giants made more items and services available to Russians.

But now a great severing is reordering that world.

The list of international companies cutting ties with Russia has continued to snowball, with accounting firms KPMG and PwC announcing they are leaving the country and Mastercard and Visa saying they will stop supporting cards issued by Russian banks. According to a list compiled by the Yale School of Management, some 300 companies had suspended operations or left the market since Putin announced the invasion.

BP, Shell and ExxonMobil have said they will abandon multibillion-dollar investments in energy. Banks and insurance companies worldwide are cutting transactions with Russian counterparts. Computer chip manufacturers, shipping companies and a host of exporters are halting deliveries to Russia to comply with sanctions. Western nations are closing their ports to Russian vessels. European retailers are shuttering shops in Russia, and Microsoft and Apple are suspending sales in the country. Starbucks said Tuesday it would pause all business activities in Russia, and Coca-Cola also suspended its business in the country.

Russia's cultural collaboration with the West is also being cut off. Cultural elites from Moscow and St. Petersburg in many cases have fled abroad. Moscow's Garage Museum stopped work on its exhibitions due to the war in Ukraine. The artistic director of the V-A-C Foundation, which oversees Moscow's new GES-2 arts center, resigned, as did the deputy director of the Pushkin Museum.

Putin's biggest critics in Russia — who tend to be from the urban upper class — may, ironically, experience the isolation more keenly than other Russians, as the country increasingly finds itself cut off from the West, said Richard Connolly, a professor who studies the Russian economy at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom.

"The constituency that is most aligned with our world view is the one [that] is going to suffer the worst," Connolly said. "The average person who works in a Chelyabinsk tractor factory is still going to be working and have access to the things they had before."

He noted Russia isn't being cut off from the world but rather relegated to a trading bloc led by Beijing. China hasn't announced sanctions on Russia and could step in where many international companies have fled, but will also "extract a price" for supporting Russia with goods and investment, Connolly said. Turkey also has not joined in on the sanctions.

The mass retreat from the Russian market by international companies has come alongside increased repression from the state.

Authorities have arrested thousands of Russians who have attempted to protest the war. On Friday, Putin signed a law threatening up to 15 years in prison for anyone who publishes "fake" news about what the

Kremlin calls the “special military operation” in Ukraine, dealing a devastating blow to the last vestiges of Russian independent media and prompting many journalists to leave the country.

Russia’s communications regulator has been bearing down on tech giants, announcing last week that it would block access to Facebook altogether. Twitter has reported Russian users facing difficulty accessing its services, but the company says its platform has not been fully blocked, and YouTube remains available. TikTok, which is hugely popular in Russia, suspended live-streaming and video uploads due to concerns about the new law on what the Kremlin considers “fake” news about the war.

“In the Soviet Union, this isolation was developed through years if not decades. It took a lot of time,” said Andrei Soldatov, a Russian journalist who focuses on the country’s security services and Internet. “Now what makes this unique is that Putin wants to build information control in a matter of days.”

Just as contraband is likely to flourish as the Russian market reels, sophisticated Internet users are likely to find ways to continue accessing blocked content. Already, many are turning to virtual private networks, or VPNs, though it’s unclear how long that approach will work.

The three most-downloaded nongame applications in Russia from Apple and Google from Feb. 24 to Mar. 6 were two VPN applications and the messaging service Telegram, according to digital intelligence firm Sensor Tower.

Between those dates, Telegram was installed more than 1 million times in Russia, while the secure messaging application Signal saw 223,000 installations, according to Sensor Tower.

A sizable contingent of Russians has fled the country. Between 20,000 and 25,000 Russians have entered Georgia in recent days, the country’s economic minister, Levan Davitashvili, said Monday.

A Western executive at one European company that is closing its Moscow office said several of his Russian colleagues have grabbed little more than their coats and passports in recent days and headed to the airport to catch any international flight they could.

Some have landed in Dubai or Istanbul with a few hundred dollars in their pocket and little idea how they will get by, he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity for personal safety reasons.

“They are aghast at what is happening to Ukraine. Some are leaving because they just don’t want to have anything to do with it,” the executive said. Rumors of the Kremlin declaring martial law and shutting the borders, he said, has also “absolutely terrified people.” So far, Moscow hasn’t prevented Russians from leaving.

One young professional woman from Moscow was visiting Dubai when the invasion began. Instead of returning home as planned, she and her family traveled to Italy, where they plan to stay indefinitely. They already had residence papers and a place to stay in Italy through their small business, the woman said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because she hopes to return to Russia someday.

She said she knows about 50 other Russians who have fled in recent days. Many of them, she said, lack sufficient financial resources to live abroad.

She is worried about her parents back in Russia and advised them to buy a year’s worth of their medication in case there are shortages.

“I am lucky. I had foreign [bank] accounts,” she said. “My thought was I would be prepared for the future, and then the future comes in a rush, in one click.”

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HEADLINE	03/09 Russia allows patent theft
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/03/09/russia-allows-patent-theft/

GIST	<p>Russia has effectively legalized patent theft from anyone affiliated with countries “unfriendly” to it, declaring that unauthorized use will not be compensated.</p> <p>The decree, issued this week, illustrates the economic war waged around Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, as the West levies sanctions and pulls away from Russia’s huge oil and gas industry. Russian officials have also raised the possibility of lifting restrictions on some trademarks, according to state media, which could allow continued use of brands such as McDonald’s that are withdrawing from Russia in droves.</p> <p>The effect of losing patent protections will vary by company, experts say, depending on whether they have a valuable patent in Russia. The U.S. government has long warned of intellectual property rights violations in the country; last year Russia was among nine nations on a “priority watch list” for alleged failures to protect intellectual property. Now Russian entities could not be sued for damages if they use certain patents without permission.</p> <p>The patent decree and any further lifting of intellectual property protections could affect Western investment in Russia well beyond any de-escalation of the war in Ukraine, said Josh Gerben, an intellectual property lawyer in Washington. Firms that already saw risks in Russian business would have more reason to worry.</p> <p>“It’s just another example of how [Putin] has forever changed the relationship that Russia will have with the world,” Gerben said.</p> <p>Russia’s decree removes protections for patent holders who are registered in hostile countries, do business in them or hold their nationality.</p> <p>The Kremlin has not issued any decree lifting protections on trademarks. But Russia’s Ministry of Economic Development said last week that authorities are considering “removing restrictions on the use of intellectual property contained in certain goods whose supply to Russia is restricted,” according to Russian state news outlet Tass, and that potential measures could affect inventions, computer programs and trademarks.</p> <p>The ministry said the measures would “mitigate the impact on the market of supply chain breaks, as well as shortages of goods and services that have arisen due to the new sanctions of western countries,” Tass stated.</p> <p>Gerben said a similar decree on trademarks would pave the way for Russian companies to exploit American brand names that have halted their business in Russia. He gave a hypothetical involving McDonald’s, one of the latest global giants to suspend operations in Russia under public pressure.</p> <p>McDonald’s said Tuesday that it would temporarily close its 850 restaurants in Russia, a significant decision for a company that gets 9 percent of its revenue from Russia and Ukraine. Without trademark protections, Russia could “take those McDonald’s that got shut down and ... just let local operators operate the restaurants and call them McDonald’s,” Gerben said.</p> <p>Russia’s removal of intellectual property protections during wartime is not without precedent. Smithsonian Magazine describes how the German company Bayer lost its American patent on aspirin as the U.S. government seized property from firms associated with its enemies.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Gas prices new highs but for how long?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/03/09/gas-prices-going-up-russia-ukraine/
GIST	Gas prices have hit record highs in recent days as reactions to Russia’s assault on Ukraine diminish the availability of crude oil and create a stark imbalance between supply and demand.

The cost per gallon of gasoline in the United States hovered around \$4.30 on Wednesday, shattering a record of \$4.10 set just before the financial crisis in 2008, according to the price-tracking service GasBuddy. In the first week of March, prices rose by about \$0.49 — roughly 14 percent.

Customers filling up their tanks are expressing frustration with the increased cost of commuting to work, dropping off their children at school or driving to visit family members. Amid the fallout from the invasion by Russia, the world's top oil exporter, the economic pain is unlikely to end soon.

"You don't often talk about the cost of milk or the price of a gallon of milk or a loaf of bread, but you do talk about the price of a gallon of gas," said Jack Gillis, executive director of the Consumer Federation of America, an association of consumer advocacy organizations. "It's something that's in our face on a regular basis. So it is pretty shocking to consumers."

Why are gas prices so high?

Before the [coronavirus pandemic](#), gas prices [were on the decline](#).

A price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia was driving down the [price of crude oil](#), which is refined to make gasoline. Once the pandemic set in and people hunkered down in their homes, demand plummeted and prices declined further. Companies that produce oil drastically decreased production to protect themselves from bankruptcy, said Patrick De Haan, GasBuddy's head of petroleum analysis.

As vaccines became available, people resumed commuting and sought a release from cabin fever through travel. After shutting down wells and laying off employees, De Haan said, oil companies have been slow to catch up to the rapid rise in gasoline demand. That caused prices to climb.

"It's like the doors just opened all at once and everyone went rushing through them," he said. "Americans started fueling up constantly. After two years of being in lockdown, Americans hit the road."

Then, as Russia's attack on Ukraine unfolded, the market began adding a risk assessment to the price of oil, making it spike, said Devin Gladden, a spokesman for auto club AAA and an adviser at the Energy Department during the Obama administration.

The effect was compounded by sanctions banning U.S. banks from transacting with financial institutions in Russia. On Tuesday, the Biden administration took steps [toward banning Russian oil imports altogether](#). Only about 3 percent of crude oil consumed in the United States comes from Russia. But because Russia is a major producer on the world stage, volatility there makes oil prices rise globally, said Frank Macchiarola, senior vice president of policy, economics and regulatory affairs at the American Petroleum Institute, a trade and lobbying group.

"Anytime you have unrest in a large producing region, you put that supply into question and you send the market signals — and markets respond," Macchiarola said. Other factors have also hampered the supply of oil, he said, including labor shortages and supply chain constraints induced by the pandemic.

After the sudden increase in demand and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, domestic energy producers are "racing to catch up," Gladden said.

Have the Biden administration's domestic oil policies played a role in rising gas prices?

In announcing the ban on Russian oil, President Biden acknowledged there would be costs domestically. But he cast the blame on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"The decision today is not without cost here at home," [Biden said](#). "Putin's war is already hurting American families at the gas pump. Since Putin began his military buildup at Ukrainian borders, just since then, the price of the gas at the pump in America went up 75 cents, and with this action it's going to go up further. I'm going to do everything I can to minimize Putin's price hike here at home."

In Macchiarola's view, Biden's policies around domestic oil drilling have contributed to rising gas prices but are not a major driver of the surge. The White House has consistently signaled an interest in decreasing the country's reliance on fossil fuels in favor of clean energy sources, while the United States remains [the world's top producer](#) of oil and natural gas.

During his first year in office, Biden [outpaced the Trump administration](#) in issuing drilling permits on public lands, drawing sharp criticism from environmental advocates. But he also [halted new oil and gas leases](#) on federal lands last month, [quashed the Keystone XL oil pipeline](#) and [proposed new fees](#) for drilling on public lands and waters.

Those moves, Macchiarola said, have discouraged investment in oil supply as demand for gasoline has risen.

"This supply-and-demand imbalance occurred as a result of the pandemic and was exacerbated by the aggression in Russia and Ukraine, but the environment that's been created by [the Biden administration's] politics and rhetoric doesn't help," Macchiarola said.

Gladden countered that the Keystone XL pipeline would probably not yet be operational, even if it had gone forward. He argued that domestic oil production is more tied to pricing than to policy.

"Before the invasion and during the pandemic, prices were low, and that did not motivate energy producers to go and drill more," Gladden said. "But now that prices have skyrocketed ... they're ready to go drill because there's a pricing signal there."

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment Wednesday. But Biden argued Tuesday that loosening environmental regulations to allow more drilling would not lower gas prices.

"Transforming our economy to run on electric vehicles, powered by clean energy, will mean that no one will have to worry about gas prices," [he said on Twitter](#). "It will mean tyrants like Putin won't be able to use fossil fuels as a weapon."

An analysis by our colleague Philip Bump found that domestic gas prices [are determined more by international oil prices](#) than by domestic drilling. There was no clear correlation between domestic production and gas prices.

How long will prices be this high?

The trajectory of gas prices isn't entirely predictable. Even before the White House moved to curtail Russian oil imports, several global energy companies — including Shell, BP and ExxonMobil — had voluntarily [agreed to suspend their operations](#) in Russia. Those moves already were restricting oil supply.

As long as Russia continues to fight in Ukraine, Gladden said, gas prices are likely to remain inflated.

"We're also entering the spring and summer driving season, when gas prices typically increase because of higher demand," he said. "So we are expecting that this is going to be an expensive summer at the pump for consumers."

De Haan predicted that the national average could reach \$4.50 per gallon.

"I'm betting on this being a longer period of higher prices," he said.

What can customers do to ease the economic burden?

To state the obvious, the less you drive, the less you'll spend on gas. That's easier said than done for most people, but those with access to reliable mass transit or carpooling could consider using those options more often while gas remains relatively expensive. Reducing the clamor for gasoline also narrows the gap between supply and demand, which De Haan said should force prices down.

	<p>For everyone else, small behavior changes can make a marginal difference. Staying up to date on engine maintenance, fully inflating your tires and keeping the weight in your car light can slightly decrease the amount of gas you use.</p> <p>Driving habits also matter, Gillis said. Keeping your foot off the brake while driving can save the equivalent of \$1.42 per gallon, he said. Accelerating and decelerating smoothly, driving slowly and turning off the engine instead of idling can also help.</p> <p>Gas prices are also often a few cents per gallon cheaper for people paying with cash, while some credit cards offer rewards for gas purchases. Mondays are a good day to fill up the tank, according to GasBuddy, which in 2019 found that the average price across 30 states was lowest that day. Fridays and Saturdays were the most expensive.</p> <p>For drivers, Gillis said he worried the steep price increases could be “very difficult.”</p> <p>“Our vehicles have become critically important for our jobs, for getting our kids to day care, for so many aspects of our lives, that when the price of gas goes up, it really has an impact on consumers,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Arctic front, ‘bomb cyclone’ frigid air, snow
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/03/09/bomb-cyclone-midwest-northeast-blizzard/
GIST	<p>The start to astronomical spring is only 11 days away, but the atmosphere refuses to turn the page from winter. An Arctic cold front and a bomb cyclone developing along it are set to deliver bitter cold and a swath of snow to the Midwest, Mid-South, Appalachians and interior Northeast, along with strong winds.</p> <p>Cities along the Interstate 95 corridor from Washington to Boston will probably see mostly rain since the storm will track right along the coast, with mild air in place during the heaviest precipitation Saturday. Snow showers, however, could wrap around the backside of the potent system that will meet the criteria of a bomb cyclone, or storm that intensifies at breakneck speed.</p> <p>In parts of the interior Northeast, blizzard conditions could develop for a time Saturday amid the snow and strengthening winds. Travel in areas that receive rain in eastern New England could also become dicey Saturday night because of the possibility of a flash freeze. Crashing temperatures could turn any standing water into ice.</p> <p>The frigid air plunging south from Canada along the front will cause temperatures to drop 15 to 20 degrees in just a few hours. It will be 20 to 40 degrees colder than normal in the Rockies, the Plains and the Midwest by Friday morning. Temperatures 15 to 30 degrees below normal will reach the Great Lakes, the Mississippi Valley and the South Saturday morning and the East Coast by Sunday morning. This translates to lows in the single digits in Minneapolis on Friday, in the teens in Detroit and Chicago on Saturday, and in the teens and 20s (single digits in the mountains) in much of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic on Sunday.</p> <p>Chilly temperatures will probably persist in central and eastern areas until a warm-up in the early and middle part of next week.</p> <p>The setup</p> <p>On Friday into Saturday, a high altitude lobe of very cold air, low pressure and spin, nestled within a dip in the jet stream, will dive out of the Northern Tier and swing overhead the Tennessee Valley. The spin in the atmosphere will foster rising motion in the air to the east.</p> <p>That upward motion will suffice to strengthen a fledgling surface low pressure system riding along the Arctic front sweeping toward the East Coast. As the surface low intensifies, it will draw in more air from all sides. Since it spins counterclockwise, mild southerly winds will flow in from the east, with chilly air drawn in out of the northwest. On the warm side, rain is likely — but as the low and attendant cold front depart, cooling temperatures may flip rain to snow.</p>

The storm will intensify at a rate needed to classify it as a bomb cyclone. In fact, it may strengthen at that pace for two consecutive days, its minimum central air pressure bottoming out at that of Hurricane Sandy upon landfall in 2012 as it cruises through Newfoundland on Monday. By then, there will be a 5 percent air pressure deficit in the middle of the storm compared with outside of it, including a vacuum-like inward tug that will generate increasingly strong winds.

Where snow is likely

A few hours of light snow are possible as the Arctic front passes through the Texas Panhandle, Oklahoma, Missouri and northern Arkansas on Friday. Precipitation will increase in coverage and intensity, with moderate snow along the Interstates 44 and 70 stretches of Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio.

An influx of Gulf moisture coupled with falling temperatures will make for rain followed by moderate to briefly heavy snow in extreme northwest Mississippi, western and middle Tennessee, and West Virginia Friday night. By late Friday night into early Saturday morning, the snow will have swept into Pennsylvania, western New York State and interior western New England.

In places like Little Rock, Memphis, Nashville and Lexington, Ky., as well as Indianapolis, which were recently in the 70s and 80s, some accumulation is possible.

There are signs that snowfall amounts could double or even triple from eastern Kentucky northeastward along the Appalachians. It could be a 3- to 6-inch snowstorm for Pittsburgh, and 6 to 12 inches are possible in Syracuse, N.Y., and Burlington, Vt. The northern half of New Hampshire might get a plowable snowfall, with little in southern counties in the Granite State.

It's important to note that snowfall amounts remain uncertain since the ultimate track of the storm has yet to be ironed out. Also, snowfall maps produced by models wrongly assume every flake sticks even in areas with air and ground temperatures above freezing; so the amounts shown are probably overdone in southern areas and at lower elevations. Confidence in amounts will increase on Thursday and Friday.

For the East Coast, including cities like Richmond, D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Providence, R.I., Boston and Portland, Maine, mostly rain is expected; however, they could see some snow showers wrapping around the back side of the fast-moving storm as cold air arrives Saturday afternoon and night.

Strong winds

The contrast between weak high pressure to the east and developing strong low pressure on the East Coast will make for strong offshore winds that will ramp up especially along and east of Interstate 95 on Saturday afternoon. The Carolina Coastal Plain could see gusts topping 50 mph, as could Cape Cod and the islands.

Then behind the storm and attendant cold front, the arrival of cold air will also yield strong winds over 40 mph. It's possible that, where heavy snow and wind overlap, near-blizzard conditions could be possible in parts of interior New York state, Vermont, northern New Hampshire and western Maine Saturday afternoon and night.

Severe weather

In the southeastern United States, warm, moist air will surge ahead of the cold front. As the front works to make progress east, it will kick up pockets of mild air and form strong to severe thunderstorms. That, coupled with a change in wind speed and/or direction with height known as wind shear, will be supportive of a few rotating thunderstorms.

The National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center has outlined a Level 2 out of 5 "slight risk" for severe weather on Saturday that includes parts of northern Florida, southern Georgia and the eastern half of the Carolinas. On Saturday that risk will shift to the immediate coastlines of the Carolinas and Virginia, as well as the northern half of the Florida Peninsula. Storms are more likely the first half of Saturday.

	Damaging winds will be the main concern with any storms that draw down jet stream momentum from aloft, but a few tornadoes can't be ruled out.
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HEADLINE	03/09 Police face community concerns on tech
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/09/police-technologies-future-of-work-drones-ai-robots/
GIST	<p>Last year, police in Mountain View, Calif., knew they had a potentially dangerous situation on their hands when a man barricaded himself inside an unlocked three-story townhouse along with the homeowners.</p> <p>Police received a call from the homeowners, who said the man was armed with a knife. They didn't know whether they could safely enter the home or where to post up inside. And they didn't know the man's intentions. So instead of taking any risk, police called in their trusty sidekick: A camera-equipped drone.</p> <p>Officers on the ground used the drone to live stream video from the second- and third-floor windows, giving them the opportunity to assess the gravity of the situation and the location of the suspect. They quickly learned the man did not have any visible weapons on him.</p> <p>"There was no risk to life, so we let him sit in there and did our best to communicate with him," said Lt. Scott Nelson of the Mountain View Police Department. "No use of force was needed."</p> <p>The situation ended peacefully when after four hours, the man, who was experiencing delusions, exited the home voluntarily, police said.</p> <p>Police across the United States are increasingly relying on emerging technologies to make their jobs more efficient. In their daily work, they are using drones, license plate readers, body cameras and gunshot detection systems to reduce injury and bodily harm. The move comes as some law enforcement agencies are struggling with retention and hiring during the pandemic, when hundreds of cops in cities including Los Angeles and New York were sidelined because of the spread of the coronavirus. As police departments determine which technologies to adopt, they are also grappling with growing concerns about privacy that these technologies bring and potential complications they could create for officers on the job.</p> <p>"Tech can be a great tool for law enforcement to use," said Sgt. James Smallwood, Nashville-based treasurer of the national Fraternal Order of Police. But "as with anything else, we have to balance the line of privacy and meeting the expectation to promote public safety."</p> <p>Enter the two drones that Mountain View police say cost \$16,000 to begin operating and that they've used about a dozen times in the past two years. They've helped in potentially dangerous situations, search efforts and finding weapons. As a result, the department is looking to expand the program to include more drones with more features such as longer flight time, higher video quality and infrared capabilities, which help detect body heat.</p> <p>DJI, the Chinese tech company that makes many of the drones adopted by police departments, said more than 1,000 police departments across the country use some type of drone. But most departments that purchase DJI's drones do so through American suppliers, DJI's North American spokesman Adam Lisberg said. Drones are proving to be a police force multiplier across the nation, aiding with everything from lost children to dangerous suspects to crash reconstruction. But Lisberg doesn't think they'll ever replace police officers.</p> <p>"You need a sense of humanity at work in policing," he said. "A drone is a tool that helps accomplish the goals [police] already have. [To] do it better, safely and more efficiently."</p> <p>In terms of privacy, Lisberg says DJI advises departments to be upfront with the community on how and when the tech will and won't be used.</p>

Drones aren't the only tech tools that police say have made them more efficient. More than 120 cities are using gunshot detection systems, which alert police to gunfire within the devices' coverage area. The tech is provided by Fremont, Calif.-based ShotSpotter, which has been partnering with cities and police for 25 years.

The systems use sensors and algorithms that can identify and determine which loud bangs are probably gunshots. Within about 60 seconds, they can alert police to the precise location in which the gunshots were heard. That allows police to better deploy their resources, especially in cases where they may have had to cut back on neighborhood patrols, said Ron Teachman, ShotSpotter director of public safety solutions.

"Police chiefs are looking for innovative ways to deal with the responsibilities they have," he said. "They're finding ways to provide them even in areas where budgets are tight."

Douglas Griffith, president of the Houston Police Officers' Union, said ShotSpotter has helped the Houston Police Department make more than 70 arrests as well as respond to gunshot victims faster. The department has 400 fewer officers than it did 24 years ago, yet they are still responsible for covering 671 square miles.

"We have to rely on tech because we don't have the manpower sometimes," Griffith said.

Police also have to consider what tech might be helpful to carry with them. Over the years that has evolved to include body cameras — which not only provide a video record of altercations but in some cases can provide automated reporting — license plate readers and laptops that help them document from the field, and less-lethal restraining devices.

Nelson said Mountain View is one of the first police departments in the Bay Area to start using a restraining device called the BolaWrap. The device, which discharges two lasso-like tethers to temporarily wrap up a person's arms or legs, is expected to be a less harmful restraining device than a Taser. The department has about 25 of the devices, which have aided in situations like mental health crises when people may harm themselves, Nelson said.

And in some cases, tech that police adopt has the ability to integrate with personal technology that residents own. The Seattle Police Department, for example, uses tech and body cameras from Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Axon. Through Axon's Citizen app, officers can send a resident a link to upload their own video or pictures, which then get tagged with the case number.

Similarly, some departments have turned to Coplogic, incident-reporting software developed by New York-based LexisNexis. Coplogic allows community members to submit their own crime reports for minor incidents, which helps free up police officers' time.

Seattle police Sgt. Randy Huserik says it helps officers "streamline the process" of creating incident reports.

"We have to do the same amount of work with less bodies," he said. "So obviously the integration of technology has the potential to enhance that."

To be sure, not all of the technology is proving to be positive, says Griffith of Houston's police union. He noted that while tech can add a level of efficiency, it also can increase stress levels for officers, who have been experiencing increased scrutiny for excessive use of force and discriminatory practices in recent years. Body cameras, for example, can help police and the community better understand the details around an incident in which an officer resorted to use of force. But the cameras also can catch small, sometimes minor policy violations from police that don't affect the overall outcome of any situation, such as whether a police officer buckled his seat belt before pressing the gas, Griffith said.

"We know that there will be more tech coming," he said. "But we pray it's something that will help [officers] and not make it to where they have to be perfect every minute of every day."

Police also have to walk a fine line when it comes to implementing new technology, taking into account the community's comfort level and privacy concerns, they say.

The New York Police Department learned that very quickly when it started using a robotic dog to help with surveillance and dangerous situations at the end of 2020. The 70-pound robot named Spot can climb stairs, traverse loose gravel and carry up to 30 pounds of equipment while using its built-in cameras to survey the area. After backlash over additional surveillance and use of police funds, the department ultimately moved to scrap its \$94,000 contract with the device maker Boston Dynamics just a few months later.

Boston Dynamics said the cancellation of the program in New York "reinforced the importance of education and dialogue when introducing new technologies" and that the company continues to work on explaining Spot's capabilities. Spot most recently has been adopted by the St. Petersburg Police Department in Florida, which last month said it plans to use the robot dog for de-escalation efforts, to avoid the use of force, or in dangerous situations. The department also said the dog will only be deployed under the supervision of the Special Weapons and Tactics team or for fire rescue efforts.

Bernie Escalante, interim chief of the Santa Cruz Police Department in California, said that in communities like his, a human police officer will provide help when needed — a consideration the department takes into account when considering adopting tech.

"There's definitely a role for [tech], but I also believe the community wants interaction and engagement with someone in uniform," he said.

Some communities are actively trying to find the right balance. After first adopting the technology, Santa Cruz banned the use of predictive policing software, which uses algorithms to predict where crimes will most likely occur. Lawmakers in Boston, Alameda, Calif., and the state of Virginia are among those who took steps to limit the use of facial recognition by law enforcement agencies. Several California cities including Pasadena and San Jose have opted for more license plate readers to curb crime even amid pushback from organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union. And San Francisco is considering broadening government access to private cameras, which it curtailed in 2019.

Farhang Heydari, executive director of the nonprofit Policing Project at New York University School of Law, said he's mostly concerned with increasing access to private cameras and third-party databases and the ability to tie them together, which could create a new kind of surveillance, he said.

That has the potential to magnify some of the harms of policing, like the overenforcement of low-level crime or the exacerbation of racial disparities. Ultimately, Heydari says, police shouldn't be charged with deciding on their own what technology to use. Regulators and communities should, he said.

But as it stands, police departments are navigating tech through research, community input and via discussions with the cities they serve. Mountain View police say that in some respects, their location in the heart of Silicon Valley serves as an advantage to evaluating tech for the department.

"We have a sworn staff here with high-tech backgrounds," said Sgt. Fernando Maldonado. "Just because someone comes in with tech doesn't mean it applies to us or that it's going to work. But we have that background [to understand it]."

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HEADLINE	03/09 Climate Pledge dumps free medical clinic
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2022/03/climate-pledge-arena-bumps-free-medical-clinic-host-concerts
GIST	October 2022 was supposed to be the triumphant, post-pandemic return of the massive, multiday medical, dental and vision clinic that provides free services to more than 3,000 people each year in what used to be

Key Arena. But the new owners of what is now called Climate Pledge Arena have made other plans, despite an agreement to keep hosting the Seattle/King County Clinic.

The Who and the Zac Brown Band will be performing in the space on clinic weekend instead of doctors, nurses and dentists.

Thanks to the significant logistical challenges of changing the date and location of the massive event, the next full clinic likely won't be held again until spring 2023, more than three years after the previous one.

"This year was going to be quite special in trying to recover and heal and find people who have not been resilient [during the pandemic] and make sure they get into care," said Karen Hays, a certified nurse-midwife and volunteer lead for the clinic's women, transgender, nonbinary health services. "The fact that we can't do that is really heartbreaking and just feels wrong."

The annual [Seattle/King County Clinic](#) began in 2014 and provides free medical, dental and vision services to people who cannot otherwise access and afford medical care. Nearly half of the attendees come from the Seattle metropolitan area, but the event draws people from across the state and even Idaho and Oregon. The majority of attendees are housed and many have some form of health insurance, but still cannot otherwise afford health care.

Hays said that in addition to often providing many patients' lone checkup for the year and getting them medical equipment such as glasses, the clinic often catches life-threatening issues, such as cancers, that would otherwise go undiagnosed.

"The clinic fills that gap in the safety net for many people in our area," said Dr. Rick Arnold, one of the clinic's medical directors. "It's hard to actually gauge the cost of an additional cancellation. But I think for these individuals it will be monumental and it's just a tragedy."

Arnold has started [a petition](#) to save this year's clinic.

Putting on a four-day medical clinic for more than 3,000 people is a huge undertaking. It requires an army of volunteers and tons of space for staging equipment and people and performing the actual checkups and procedures. There are several days of set up and tear down before and after the event. Significantly, Arnold said there's only one company on the West Coast that can supply the volume of medical equipment the clinic rents each year.

In the past, the clinic has used Key Arena and surrounding Seattle Center buildings to run its event. Key Arena is now Climate Pledge Arena and is owned and operated by the Oak View Group. As part of its operating agreement with Seattle Center, the Oak View Group agreed to continue hosting the clinic at Climate Pledge Arena if mutually agreeable dates could be found.

Planning for the 2022 clinic began in May 2021. According to Seattle Center director Robert Nellams, the Oak View Group offered some proposed dates in October 2022 to host the clinic. Of those dates, only one week worked for the clinic, but before everything was locked in, the Oak View Group booked two competing events, Zac Brown Band and The Who concerts.

The Oak View Group offered several alternative dates to use the arena, as well as use of a separate practice facility offsite, but Nellams said the clinic was unable to get its rental equipment for those dates.

"They didn't understand how much the clinic relies on the spaces and people and everything that's here in Seattle Center. And that picking up the clinic and moving wouldn't work," said Nellams.

"I know people are not happy, and I know they say something has gone wrong," Nellams continued. "In my world, things didn't necessarily go wrong. The arena had a booking, went with its booking, then tried to alter our dates. Most arenas would do that."

	<p>Katie Townsend, a spokesperson from Climate Pledge Arena, said Oak View Group remains committed to hosting the event in future years.</p> <p>“We know this event is cherished by the local community,” she said. “There has been some miscommunication or some misinformation that there isn’t a desire for the clinic to take place or there isn’t the dedication and commitment to make it happen. It’s certainly not true that the Seattle Center or Climate Pledge Arena are walking away from that. It’s simply a case of aligning our dates.”</p> <p>The Seattle/King County Clinic is hoping to put on the vision component of the clinic from Oct. 20 to 23 in Seattle Center buildings, depending on pandemic conditions. Nellams said Seattle Center is also working to organize a full medical, dental and vision clinic for April 2023 to be held around the Seattle Center grounds. Then, in future years, the clinic will likely return to Climate Pledge Arena, as originally planned.</p> <p>“For an organization that portrays themselves as community minded, this was not a community-oriented act,” said Arnold. “I want Oak View Group to be better partners going forward, to treat us like any other rock band and honor the commitments they make, particularly to those folks who don’t have a voice.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Tacoma PSE methane storage stirs conflict
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/environment/2022/03/tacoma-methane-storage-stirs-conflict-over-climate-health-and-tribal-rights
GIST	<p>In the Tideflats of Tacoma, beyond the masts of sailboats anchored in the Puyallup Tribe’s marina, pipelines emerge from the earth and snake their way inland. Their destination — an 8 million gallon liquefied methane gas tank — was once considered by politicians to be the logical answer to the climate crisis. Now, it’s the center of a local controversy with international implications.</p> <p>The tank, owned by Puget Sound Energy, is the product of a recent era of proposed climate solutions. In 2012, the Environmental Protection Agency gave the shipping company TOTE Maritime a waiver to switch its operations to methane gas, also referred to as natural gas, in order to encourage it to lower the sulfur output from its diesel emissions. Two years later, PSE signed a contract with TOTE to supply its ships with gas. Against the express wishes of the Puyallup, the 14-story waterfront tank was born.</p> <p>“The salmon are sick in the water because of facilities like [PSE’s] that continue to pollute us and dump these toxic chemicals on top of us, day in and day out,” Puyallup member Dakota Case told High Country News in January.</p> <p>The subsequent fight against the tank illustrates the critical place Indigenous sovereignty holds at the intersection of human rights and climate change. On Nov. 19, 2021, the state’s Pollution Control Hearings Board affirmed the issuance of the necessary final permits, which require PSE to monitor sulfur dioxide and volatile organic compound emissions. The Puyallup Tribe and a coalition of environmental groups represented by EarthJustice immediately appealed, arguing that the facility and its associated operations would hamper decarbonization at a life-or-death moment for the planet. They were joined by some unlikely allies: immigration advocates, who fear that it would endanger detainees in the nearby Northwest ICE Processing Center, and pensioners from Canada, who object to having their retirement funds used to help pay for the tank. The opposition, like the tank itself, is both unique and common, normal but not. Given the kind of climate solutions likely to be offered by settler-colonial institutions, it might be a glimpse of the future.</p> <p>Since time immemorial, the Tideflats have been the Puyallup’s home. The tribe came to the water to fish, traveling by canoe to gather plants for food and medicine. Prior to colonization and industrialization, shellfish were abundant at low tide. “When the tide was out, the table was set,” said Puyallup Tribal Councilmember Annette Bryan. “So you can imagine all of the tidelands without any industry as just very, very beautiful.”</p>

In the mid-1800s, Gov. Isaac Stevens forcibly dispossessed the Puyallup of their lands, though the resulting Medicine Creek Treaty preserved their rights to fish and hunt. Case said that with the treaty, Stevens made a two-part, largely unspoken, promise: “One, that these treaties shall remain intact as long as the trees grow and the rivers run, and two: You’ll sign these treaties or you’ll walk knee-deep in the blood of your people.” In the 20th century, the tribe won a series of legal and legislative victories, first and foremost against the state of Washington regarding fishing rights. That culminated in the Land Claims Settlement Act of 1989, which required the signatories, including the city of Tacoma, to consult with it on projects impacting tribal members’ way of life, especially their right to fish.

The Tideflats are not only vulnerable to sea-level rise and tsunamis; residents are also already in the 80 to 90th percentile in the nation in terms of cancer risk from air pollution. Toxic releases from industrial facilities, waste treatment storage and disposal, diesel emissions and wastewater discharges have disproportionately impacted the area as well. “It’s my belief that we cannot afford one more facility, especially another fossil fuel facility, that adds to the impacts that are already there,” Bryan said.

The Tacoma Human Rights Commission agreed in a letter it wrote to Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards in April 2019, after the city issued a final supplemental environmental impact statement. It warned that “the operation of the [methane] facility would potentially expose the South Sound community to grave environmental risks,” adding that the city had omitted the tribe “from more integral involvement” in the environmental impact scoping and drafting process. A month later, in May, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee withdrew his support for the project.

According to the governor’s press official, however, in a response emailed to High Country News, Inslee lacks authority over the permitting, which lies in the hands of the city. The Tacoma City Council, meanwhile, passed a series of ordinance amendments last November that limited new petroleum infrastructure, but still allowed for PSE’s tank. Bryan believes that the federal government failed to uphold its trust responsibility; even if it delegates regulatory authority to local jurisdictions, it doesn’t delegate its trust responsibility. And the government’s responsibility, and the lack of it, can have very real consequences. “If it’s going to impact our inherent way of life, our salmon — anything to do with us — you have to consult with us,” Case said. “We have to give you permission.”

PSE claims that its facility, which would be supplied by pipeline with gas extracted by hydraulic fracturing from Alberta and British Columbia, qualifies as a climate solution because, instead of diesel, it would supply methane gas for cargo ships and construction trucks, as well as gas for PSE’s pipeline network to local customers during periods of high demand. “In the maritime industry, there are currently no other options that can offer the same environmental benefits, so [liquefied methane gas] is the best alternative we have today,” PSE said in an emailed statement to High Country News.

Tacoma’s supplemental environmental impact statement similarly claimed that the project would offset diesel emissions from ships, resulting in a net greenhouse gas benefit. And the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency declined to conduct a health impact assessment, stating that emissions of toxic air pollution would be “acceptable under all applicable requirements.” According to Peter Erickson, an internationally recognized climate expert based in Seattle, the city’s review was fundamentally flawed and misleading. Erickson testified in front of the Pollution Control Hearings Board on March 19, 2021, saying that project-associated methane emissions are inconsistent with state, national and global commitments to reduce emissions because they would increase gas consumption and hinder decarbonization.

The Puyallup aren’t the only people affected by the region’s continued commitment to extractive energy. Immigrants in the Northwest Immigration and Customs Enforcement Processing Center, an immigrant detention facility operated by the GEO Group, are also at risk. The center was built next to an EPA Superfund site, now a metals recycling facility. In 2018, lithium-ion batteries in the facility ignited, burning car remnants and emitting fumes that the detainees could smell, according to Maru Mora-Villalpando, an immigrant advocate with La Resistencia. “Everybody is saying, ‘This is gonna be terrible if something happens. Tacoma is in danger,’” Villalpando said. “Just think about the people that are detained right here.” The GEO Group did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

The poor air quality means that Ivan Sanchez, who is detained at the facility, has to use an inhaler. He said air filtration isn't properly maintained and the bad air comes and goes. The drinking water is often brown and doesn't taste right, he added, and bottled water costs detainees \$2 a bottle. Conditions are already bad, and the thought that they could be worsened by yet another fossil fuel facility has brought La Resistencia and the Tacoma Human Rights Commission into the fight. In the same 2019 letter to the mayor, the commission found that the tank would "potentially subject [Puyallup] Tribal members and [Northwest ICE Processing Center] detainees, in particular, to a disparate environmental impact in violation of their human rights."

PSE is owned by the Macquarie Group, a global financial services group, and a consortium of pension funds: the Alberta Investment Management Corp., British Columbia Investment Management Corp., the Ontario Municipal Employees' Retirement System, the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan and PGGM Vermogensbeheer of the Netherlands. The funds either declined to comment or didn't respond to questions regarding the project's potential human rights violations. The pensioners themselves include public service employees from Canada and the Netherlands, and at least two are unhappy with the way their funds are being used.

James Rowe, a professor of environmental studies at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, said these pension funds represent a massive amount of capital, which could be used either to accelerate or slow decarbonization. Rowe, who draws a pension from BCI, said it angers him that his retirement money is funding the methane gas facility, given that he teaches his students about the importance of climate action and respecting Indigenous sovereignty. Mary Lynn Young, a professor at the University of British Columbia, who recently co-authored a book on Indigenous representation in the media, was likewise concerned to learn her pension fund was being invested in the project. She told High Country News that she is in the process of moving her funds to a fossil-free investment option offered by BCI.

But short of the city forcing PSE to pull the plug on the gas tank, there is no clear or immediate solution in the offing. The project instead leaves Tacoma as a near-perfect symbol of the climate crisis: An American city ignoring a sovereign Indigenous nation, waving a climate emergency declaration about in one hand and a massive tank of methane gas in the other.

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HEADLINE	03/09 High oil, gas prices here to stay?
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/economy/articles/2022-03-09/high-oil-and-gas-prices-are-here-to-stay
GIST	<p>No amount of whining about \$4-plus gas prices can change the simple truth that the price of oil and gas is likely to remain high.</p> <p>There's one reason why: Current demand outstrips supply. Politicians, consumers, social media trolls all offer their analyses for why things have reached this point from the supposedly anti-energy policies of the Biden administration to the craven greed of oil companies.</p> <p>But the price pressure was building once the immediate economic hit of the coronavirus subsided in 2020, and Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine two weeks ago was like throwing a lit match into a can of gas.</p> <p>The U.S. ban on Russian oil imports announced Tuesday by President Joe Biden will only aggravate the situation in the short term, a point he noted in his comments from the White House.</p> <p>"Defending freedom has a cost," Biden said. That did not stop Republicans, who had clamored for the move, from blaming the high gas prices on Democrats.</p> <p>But, politics aside, the U.S. is already the world's No. 1 oil producer and currently exports oil to other countries. Prior to the pandemic, the U.S. had ramped up production to around 13 million barrels a day. Then the pandemic struck and production fell like a rock to below 10 million barrels a day as wells were shuttered and the industry saw bankruptcies and layoffs.</p>

Like most businesses, the oil business was caught flat-footed when the economic recovery from the pandemic proved greater than anticipated and demand for oil began to return. Still, production increased quickly but also fell during spells in which coronavirus variants surfaced and economic activity took a hit. As of February, production has hit 11.6 million barrels a day – well below the peak in early 2020, though considerably higher than its pandemic-era lows.

But Americans had been busy during the intervening months, embarking on a massive spending spree, flush with cash from being locked down during the pandemic and massive amounts of stimulus from the federal government. They bought bigger homes, gas-guzzling vehicles, boats and began taking to the roads en masse still fearful of flying.

While supplies of overall oil and related products rose 12.3% from the same period last year during the past week, inventories remain about 13% below their five-year average for this time of year, according to the Energy Information Administration. Crude oil imports are currently running about 10% above last year at this time.

Yet the financial crisis that hit the industry during the pandemic chastened producers. They revamped their businesses away from the debt-fueled expansion of the past, using the recovery in profits to reward shareholders and please Wall Street. Strict production levels were imposed and financial discipline became the watchword. Even as recently as before the invasion of Ukraine, companies were touting that returns to shareholders and committing to production increases on the order of 5% a year.

“We have learned our lesson,” Devon Energy CEO Rick Muncrief said in an interview with the Financial Times in mid-February. Devon is a darling of Wall Street. Its stock has risen from \$16 a share to trading at around \$60 now.

Now, with oil trading recently above \$125 a barrel, the question is whether domestic producers will increase their production more than planned and just how fast they can do it, given that in good times it might take a month or so to bring new oil to market. And these are not normal times, given supply chain disruptions, worker shortages and many unknowns about the international oil markets.

“I think a major ramp-up is coming, it’s inevitable with prices at this level,” says Ben Cahill, senior fellow in the Energy Security and Climate Change Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

“My sense is if you throw enough money at a problem something will happen, but it will take months,” Cahill adds.

Alex Andlauer, an industry analyst at Kpler, wrote on Tuesday that “the process of adding new barrels to the market can take up to three months for uncompleted wells,” those that have been drilled but are not currently producing.

“The number of uncompleted wells is currently around 4,400 – that’s nearly half compared to the high of summer 2020 according to (the Energy Information Administration), but still enough to start new production,” Andlauer added.

One of the biggest constraints to bringing new production online is the cost and, in some cases the absence, of key materials such as sand, which is used in fracking.

Still, oil is a global commodity and there are other sources of oil that could be brought to market. The obvious answer is increasing production in other countries. The U.S. appears to have reached out to Venezuela, which is under international sanctions, and there have been some rumblings of interest on the part of key producers such as the United Arab Emirates.

Sonya Savage, the energy minister for the Canadian province of Alberta, was quoted as saying at a recent industry conference in Houston that Alberta has spare pipeline and rail capacity that could move more oil to the United States.

	<p>Oil prices did fall sharply on Wednesday, with international benchmark Brent crude tumbling 13% as markets further digested Biden's Tuesday ban on Russian oil imports. Traders said markets were coming to the conclusion that the damage may not be as severe as first thought.</p> <p>The wild card is and will be the actions of Putin. And that is hard to predict, says Agathe Demarais, global forecasting director of the Economist Intelligence Unit and an expert on Russia. The EIU is already forecasting the war in Ukraine will cost the global economy \$400 billion this year, knocking growth down from 3.9% to 3.4%.</p> <p>"The reality is we don't know and don't have a clue," what Putin is thinking, Demarais says. But she notes the sanctions the U.S. and its allies have imposed, including restrictions on the country's central bank and blocks on the foreign reserves held outside Russia are likely to cause major economic damage.</p> <p>"It's about half of its foreign bank reserves," or about \$300 billion or so, she says. "That will have a massive impact."</p> <p>"Oil prices are going to remain quite high as long as the conflict remains in Ukraine," Demarais says, adding that the conflict could continue "several months, perhaps even years."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 LAPD faces serious recruitment problem
SOURCE	https://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/the-lapd-is-having-a-serious-recruitment-problem/
GIST	<p>As the mayor's race heats up, the leading candidates are all harrumphing about growing the size of the Los Angeles Police Department, which now numbers about 9,500 officers. The only question is by how much. The suggested boost ranges from the additional 200 cops U.S. Rep. Karen Bass wants to see, to the approximately 1,500 sworn personnel proposed first by Councilman Joe Buscaino, and then by mall developer Rick Caruso.</p> <p>There's just one problem: The LAPD can barely get people to come aboard. The department will be lucky in the near future just to maintain its current staffing level.</p> <p>When it comes to hiring police officers, the city is moving about as quickly as a raft floating in a river of molasses and glue. Police Chief Michel Moore pointed to the problem when he spoke to the civilian Los Angeles Police Commission on March 1.</p> <p>Police Academy recruitment classes generally have about 60 cadets, and the aim in the fiscal year that runs through June 30 is to hire 740 new cops and push the number of sworn personnel north of 9,700.</p> <p>Instead, Moore told the Police Commission that the last four classes have all contained 40 or fewer recruits.</p> <p>"At this pace we will significantly fall below our goal of 740 hires for this year," he told the panel.</p> <p>This is eye-opening. The LAPD is the second-biggest law enforcement agency in the nation, trailing only the New York City Police Department, and has a budget in the current fiscal year of \$1.76 billion. Its hiring machine has been rolling for decades. The aim for five dozen cadets in each class accounts for a washout rate of about 20%.</p> <p>In the effort to deal with a constant swell of retirements, the department dangles a number of carrots, starting with some big financial ones. The LAPD hiring website touts a beginning salary of nearly \$71,000 during the Academy process, and cops with one year on the force earn more than \$80,000. Sworn personnel get 15 vacation days after a year of service, and 23 days with 10 years on the force. The average base pay for the thousands of department personnel with the rank of lieutenant and below is \$109,705, according to data on the website of City Controller Ron Galperin.</p>

Then there's OT. Last year, 36 department employees made more than \$100,000 just in overtime. Even better, many cops enjoy a "compressed schedule," and work either three 12-hour shifts a week, or four 10-hour days.

The LAPD is not the only law enforcement organization having trouble maintaining its ranks. The 2020 racial justice protests by Black Lives Matter and other organizations after the murder of George Floyd ignited the "defund the police" movement, and may have cast a shadow over jobs that more people previously found appealing. A CNN.com article last month said factors including COVID-19 and the changing climate for law enforcement have hampered hiring across the nation. It referenced staffing challenges in police departments from Philadelphia to Seattle.

Moore said the LAPD is seeking to expand the number of applicants, and is looking at offering housing, wage or other incentives. He added that with a scarce labor market, "most organizations if not all are experiencing challenges in recruitment."

Yet Moore pointed a bigger finger at the city Personnel Department. He said there are actually plenty of people seeking to join the LAPD, but that the hiring process is barely crawling along.

"We are in active conversations with the Personnel Department to increase the number of recruits that are being processed and qualified for entry into the Academy," he told the Police Commission. It is the "through-put," he added, that "is frankly too slow and taking too long."

It's a quagmire. Moore said that currently 33 members of the LAPD are working on supporting Personnel Department hiring efforts.

But this is not a new problem. In December, Moore related similar concerns, and told the Police Commission he had just shifted additional staff to support the Personnel Department. Somehow the clog, instead of being cleared, just got bigger.

All this plays out against a grander scale. Los Angeles politicians going back to at least Mayor Richard Riordan in the 1990s talked up the aim to get the LAPD to 10,000 officers. That plateau wasn't hit until 2013 when Antonio Villaraigosa was mayor. Keeping staffing elevated was an issue in the 2013 mayor's race between Eric Garcetti and Wendy Greuel.

The number of sworn cops stayed in five figures until the pandemic hit and city leaders briefly looked to re-allocate some funding after the George Floyd protests erupted. And it's a topic that remains fiercely political. Activists want a smaller LAPD with money taken from policing and dedicated instead to communities and efforts to help people experiencing homelessness. The Police Protective League, the powerful union representing most LAPD officers, naturally wants more cops, and has endorsed Caruso, who envisions a department with 11,000 men and women in blue.

Given the historic staffing of the department, getting to 11,000 is probably a pipe dream, something floated to appeal to a certain segment of voters. It seems even more farfetched when just making it to 10,000 cops is drifting further away.

Ultimately, there may be more backsliding. The next Academy class begins this month, and though the figure could change, on March 1 Moore said, "at this point we have less than 30 applicants we believe will be qualified." A moment later he added, "Right now we're looking at a very dismal number."

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HEADLINE	03/09 Huge numbers people stuck at Mexico border
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/09/us-mexico-border-title-42-biden-trump-stranded-asylum
GIST	When Henry Ruiz* and Raquel Hernandez boarded a bus heading north to America with their two young children, they knew there would be no going back.

It was June 2021, and a few weeks earlier Ruiz, a 28-year-old banana farmer from central Mexico, had been abducted by a group of armed men and taken to an isolated ranch where 15 others – 13 men and two women – were being held.

The assailants were members of an ultra-violent Mexican cartel fighting to take over the local banana industry, and needed to recruit locals as informants and hitmen in order to push out a rival gang and community self-defense force.

Ruiz was beaten with planks of wood and wire, leaving him with two broken ribs, gashes across his back and unable to see out of his right eye. Photos seen by the Guardian confirm the injuries.

According to Ruiz, he and five others were forced to kill and bury the rest of the detainees while gang members filmed the macabre acts. They took Ruiz's motorbike, wallet and bank details before abandoning him on the road near his home. His bank account was emptied a few days later.

The family fled as soon as Ruiz was strong enough to travel and arrived in Sonoyta, a small border town in the state of Sonora, hoping to seek asylum in the US.

But the border was closed due to Title 42 – an arcane public health order issued in March 2020 by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under pressure from the Trump administration.

“We were traumatised and terrified, with nowhere else to go,” said Ruiz, tearing up while recounting his experiences.

Title 42, which the Biden government has elected to keep in place, has led to hundreds of thousands of people being denied their legal right to seek asylum since the start of the pandemic.

The order effectively replaced Remain in Mexico – another controversial Trump-era deterrent policy also known as Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) – and has used the pretext of Covid to authorize more than 1.4m expulsions at the border in the past two years.

“By and large immigration policy hasn't changed under Biden, and that's the problem,” said Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, policy counsel at the Washington-based American Immigration.

Across the border, huge numbers of people are stuck – unable to move forward or go back.

Ruiz said: “Title 42 has prevented us from living, everyday I wake up and nothing has changed. But the pandemic is just an excuse, as if people without papers can get Covid and those with papers are immune.”

For the past eight months, the family has lived in a shelter, unable to venture more than a few blocks in fear of being apprehended by Mexican authorities or criminals. Their daughter, a bright shy girl with a big smile who just turned seven, misses school and her grandparents; their one-year-old son recently learned to walk.

“I don't know whether to cry or scream, we're stuck and have no idea when this will end,” said Hernandez, 23, Ruiz's wife.

Sonoyta is an unremarkable desert town with 20,000 people, a booming asparagus industry, and a minor border crossing popular with American snowbird retirees and tourists heading to the beach.

The town also has four shelters where almost 200 Mexicans and Central Americans had been stuck for months or more, hoping the Biden administration would rescind title 42.

But last month, about a third left after immigration attorneys visiting the migrant resource centre told them that the border would likely remain shut unless pending litigation succeeded in exempting families from title 42.

It's not clear where they all went, but some tried their luck seeking asylum at other border crossings like Reynosa, Tamaulipas (which borders Texas), where the state governor banned Biden from expelling families with children under seven. Others paid coyotes or smugglers to cross the Sonoran desert – where thousands of people have died trying to traverse the remote, punishing terrain.

“Title 42 has nothing to do with Covid, it's a terrific vehicle for stopping immigration,” said John Orlowski from Shelters for Hope, a non-profit which helped set-up the resource centre that provides meals, clothes, internet and medical care. “For people here the situation is worse under Biden: there's no progress, few exceptions, and no updates.”

In essence, title 42 has prohibited the vast majority of Mexicans and Central Americans from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala – the countries which historically account for most migrants and refugees – from being allowed to seek asylum in the US.

Across the southern border, just over half of all arrivals have been turned away and expelled to Mexico or flown home on charter flights since the start of the pandemic, including thousands of Haitian asylum seekers. (Millions of Americans and those with visas enter the country overland and by plane every month.)

But in south-west Arizona, where Trump constructed a 30ft border wall across the Sonoran desert through sacred Indigenous land and protected national parks, more than 80% of people have been expelled without the opportunity to make their case.

“The Tucson sector has one of the highest expulsion rates along the border and the exemptions have no rhyme or reason which leaves people desperate. The Biden administration keeps hiding behind the CDC but the evidence suggests that title 42 has become part of the deterrent policy, and has nothing to do with public health,” said Reichlin-Melnick.

There's a major US customs and border protection (CBP) station between Sonoyta and Ajo, Arizona – a former mining community now popular with retirees, artists and humanitarian groups.

But desperate people do desperate things, and this area has seen the highest level of desert deaths ever recorded.

On a hot cloudless day last week, the Guardian accompanied volunteers from Ajo Samaritans on a tough hike to drop gallons of water and cans of beans in two remote areas where people are currently passing through.

It was deep into the desert – a two-hour drive from Ajo, followed by a nine-mile round trip on foot through Organ Pipe Cactus national monument and Cabeza Prieta wildlife refuge – with virtually no shade. In the summer, temperatures regularly top 100F (38C).

As migrants are forced to take longer, harder routes to avoid surveillance technology and border patrols, humanitarian groups struggle to keep up and get water to the right places.

But amid the vast desolate cacti forest there were signs of recent human activity: empty energy drink cans, a pair of ripped beige jeans, a black cardigan and several worn out carpet shoes – makeshift denim slippers to avoid leaving footprints. Three gallons of water left by the volunteers a week earlier – their first drop at this location – were gone.

The group came across two degraded bones in separate locations. Each was photographed and sent to the Pima county coroner, the location tagged on GPS, and the spot marked with a dated red ribbon. This was

followed by a moment's silence to reflect on the 3,830 immigrants who have died in the Arizona Sonora desert, and the disappeared not yet found.

The coroner later confirmed that neither bone was human. Still, two degraded human remains have been found during water drops by these volunteers in the past fortnight. In January, 15 bodies were found across the desert, most months after they had died, according to Humane Borders and Pima county. In 2021, 226 mostly recently deceased bodies were recovered, a record high.

"This isn't just about title 42 or Remain in Mexico, it's the prevention through detention (PTD) policy and continued increase in militarization of the border since 1994, which has forced people further and further into the desert. The PTD legislation is designed to kill people, and since its implementation the number of deaths has increased every year," said Jo, a seasoned volunteer who asked for her surname be withheld.

In his 2022 State of the Union address, Biden's promise to reform immigration was met with derision by advocates.

"President Biden is not just carrying out the toxic, white supremacist legacy of the Trump era, but unbelievably in some instances he has doubled down," said Erika Andiola of the advocacy group Raices, in response to the speech.

Both the White House and the CDC recently relaxed guidance on Covid public health measures as part of the "new phase" of the pandemic, without mentioning title 42.

Avril Benoît, executive director of Doctors Without Borders USA, said: "The Biden administration is promoting a policy of learning to live with the virus, yet continues applying title 42 to turn away people seeking protection in the US ... This is an outrageous double standard."

While the administration asked the supreme court to overturn a lower court decision blocking the end of Remain in Mexico, it has also expanded the pool of immigrants to which the policy applies. The CDC, which exempted unaccompanied children from title 42 soon after Biden took office, said it continues to review whether the order remains necessary to protect the public health every 60 days.

Back in Sonoyta, Ruiz and Hernandez don't have the money to pay a coyote to try and cross the dangerous desert or even get them to a different port of entry where they may be allowed to apply for asylum. Even if they could borrow the money, there's no way of knowing if they would be granted a rare exemption or simply turned away.

Ruiz said: "I had a good job, we were happy. But now we have no choice, we must wait for an opportunity to sit down with someone and explain what happened and why we can never go back."

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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia ramps up deadly attacks
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-ramps-up-attacks-after-deadly-hit-on-maternity-hospital-11646907696
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine—Moscow launched a fresh assault on the besieged southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol on Thursday, a day after one of its planes bombed a maternity hospital, illustrating how a new, more destructive phase of Russia's invasion is taking a civilian toll.</p> <p>On the 15th day of fighting, Ukrainian authorities raised the casualty count of Wednesday's hospital bombing to three dead and 17 wounded.</p> <p>Elsewhere, Ukraine's government resumed efforts to evacuate civilians from a handful of cities where Ukrainian and Russian forces have agreed to a tentative cease-fire. While similar efforts have failed because of fighting, the Ukrainian government said Thursday that 35,000 civilians had escaped through agreed-upon corridors since the first were organized earlier this week.</p>

Attempts to evacuate Mariupol, a strategically important city on Ukraine's southern coast, have failed repeatedly. Its siege and bombardment is becoming a cautionary tale for what might happen to other Ukrainian cities as Russia presses its invasion.

The Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers on Thursday morning kicked off a meeting on the sidelines of an international conference in Antalya, Turkey. Talks between the two sides on Monday [failed to achieve much progress](#).

Before the latest meeting Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said he had limited expectations for the meeting, telling his Turkish counterpart that he hoped for a meeting instead between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin. President Biden also is scheduled to hold a phone call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss the latest developments.

Video footage released by the Mariupol mayor's office of the bombed hospital showed wounded people being pulled out of the partially collapsed hospital complex. A wide, deep bomb crater was visible, with signs that the blast had knocked down trees and torched cars.

Mariupol has faced more than a week of Russian shelling that has cut off water and power in the city of more than 400,000, where remaining residents have been hunkering down in basements. More than 1,200 civilians have died in the assault, local authorities said.

The city's deputy mayor said other, uncounted bodies couldn't be recovered because of intense shelling, and that 47 were buried in a common grave on Wednesday. The hospital was the second to be hit after a major clinic with 600 beds was targeted earlier in the week. A blood bank was also bombed, Deputy Mayor Serhiy Orlov said.

The World Health Organization, a United Nations body, on Thursday said it had verified 24 attacks on health facilities, workers and ambulances, including 12 deaths and 17 injuries. "Some of the main health challenges we see are hypothermia and frostbite, respiratory diseases, lack of treatment for cardiovascular diseases and cancer, and mental health issues," Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters.

The shelling of Mariupol and similar attacks on other cities across Ukraine that are within range of Russian forces indicated that Moscow, having failed to swiftly take control of the country after it launched its invasion two weeks ago, was advancing with increasing disregard for civilian casualties. Moscow has said its forces aren't deliberately targeting civilians. Ukrainian forces, unable to match the Russians in manpower or weaponry, have shown a preference to falling back to urban areas, where fierce fighting is anticipated.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused the U.S. on Wednesday of declaring "economic war" on Russia after President Biden banned imported oil and other energy sources from the country.

In the U.S., the House overwhelmingly passed legislation that would block Russian oil imports, following Mr. Biden's ban on Russian energy imports using his executive authority. The legislation would also require the U.S. Trade Representative to encourage other World Trade Organization members to suspend trade concessions to Russia and take other steps to suspend Russia from the body.

The British government Thursday imposed sanctions against Russian billionaires, including Roman Abramovich and Oleg Deripaska. It also froze assets of Igor Sechin and other close allies of Mr. Putin as it looks to further pressure Kremlin-linked businessmen.

The Western countries also continue to look for ways to boost Ukrainian defenses, though the Pentagon on Wednesday also rejected the idea of North Atlantic Treaty Organization members providing Soviet-built MiG-29 combat jets to Ukraine, despite intense lobbying by Kyiv.

	<p>The top U.S. military officer in Europe, Gen. Tod Wolters, early Thursday defended the MiG decision. “The intelligence community assesses the transfer of MiG-29s to Ukraine may be mistaken as escalatory and could result in Russian escalation with NATO,” he said, “producing a high-risk scenario.” He said the provision of antitank weapons and air-defense systems to Ukraine made more sense.</p> <p>Russian forces inched forward in an effort to encircle Kyiv, reaching the outskirts of another suburb west of the city and bombing Ukrainian positions southwest of the capital.</p> <p>As civilian casualties have mounted, Mr. Zelensky has stepped up his rhetoric against Moscow as well as the West for not imposing a no-fly zone over Ukraine that NATO fears could lead to a direct conflict with Russia.</p> <p>“How much longer will the world be an accomplice to ignoring terror?” Mr. Zelensky tweeted after the bombing of the maternity hospital. “You have power but you seem to be losing humanity.”</p> <p>The British Defense Ministry on Thursday said that as Russian losses mount, “President Putin will be forced to draw from across the Russian Armed Forces and other sources to replace losses.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Russians flee: sanctions bite; clampdown
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russians-rush-to-leave-as-sanctions-bite-and-putin-clamps-down-on-dissent-over-ukraine-war-11646848224
GIST	<p>It isn't just Ukrainians who are fleeing. Russians are leaving their homeland too.</p> <p>One man, worried he might soon be unable to buy insulin for his wife, loaded two suitcases with medicine, two more with clothes and left with his spouse to stay with their daughter in Germany.</p> <p>Another left as soon as he had buried his mother, seeking to settle in Israel, saying he felt suffocated by war propaganda. A woman who was arrested at an antiwar march swiftly gathered her things and flew to Armenia with her young son.</p> <p>One Russian who entered Finland on Monday said that after his train crossed the border, a passenger near him shouted “Glory to Ukraine!”</p> <p>Harsh sanctions, growing isolation and fear of President Vladimir Putin’s increasingly repressive rule are driving thousands of Russians out of their country. While the numbers pale compared with the two million who have fled Ukraine, they could be the front edge of a wave of people leaving due to shrinking political freedom and economic hardship. Many of those leaving are professionals and well-to-do Russians, along with journalists, activists and cultural figures.</p> <p>“My father said, ‘Leave, leave, leave, you can get stuck here’,” Julia Zakharova, a 36-year-old employee of an American company said Tuesday minutes after crossing the Finnish border with Russia. For years, she and her Greek husband, a chief executive of a tech startup, have been commuting by plane between Russia and Greece, but they have now decided to relocate for the foreseeable future to Greece, partly because she was seven months pregnant.</p> <p>“I’m not going to give birth in Russia when the perspective is like this,” Ms. Zakharova said.</p> <p>Precise data on how many Russian nationals have left in recent weeks wasn’t available, and it isn’t clear that everyone who crosses a border will stay away long term. However, data shared by different countries suggests the figure is in the thousands.</p> <p>About 44,000 people crossed the Russian border into Finland in February, up from some 27,000 in the same month last year, according to the Finnish Border Guard. Bus and train tickets to Finland are sold out,</p>

and Finland's state-owned rail operator VR has said it would try to add more trains to its Helsinki-St. Petersburg connection.

Some have left Russia for countries such as Turkey, Georgia and Armenia, which offer Russians visa-free entry or have relaxed entry requirements.

Georgia's economy minister has said that between 20,000 and 25,000 Russians entered the country in recent days. Israel has issued 1,400 immigrant visas to Russians since the invasion of Ukraine, Neta Briskin-Peleg, an immigration official, was quoted as saying in the Israeli daily Haaretz on Tuesday.

The opportunities to leave Russia are rapidly narrowing. Russia has reciprocated airspace bans restricting access to airlines including those from the European Union, the U.K. and Canada. Following sanctions targeting Russia's aviation sector, leased Russian planes were impounded at airports outside the country. Major Russian airlines have halted international flights, while Moscow's flag carrier Aeroflot halted all flights abroad except to Belarus.

Some Russians fear that Mr. Putin may soon declare martial law, which would enable him to further expand censorship and shut the borders. Mr. Putin said Saturday there was no need to declare martial law.

An actress and director from St. Petersburg who was arrested at an antiwar protest a few days after Russia's invasion, rushed to buy plane tickets to Armenia for herself and her 5-year-old son after she was released.

She said she waited at the airport for 16 hours for a flight packed with Russian families. Once in Yerevan, she learned that a police officer had visited her address in St. Petersburg. She is worried about going back to Russia but said she only has enough money to get by in the Armenian capital for one or two months.

"I don't know what I'll do," she said.

Mr. Putin has long sought to silence critics, but pressure mounted last week when the Russian Parliament passed a law imposing jail terms of up to 15 years in jail for intentionally spreading "fake" information about the military.

"We are forbidden from even calling it a war," said Evan Sergeyev, who was traveling with his wife and their 5-year-old son to Barcelona to stay with friends for an indefinite period. Mr. Putin said his invasion of Ukraine is a "special operation."

On the messaging app Telegram, Russians swap logistical details on visa procurements and Covid-19 test requirements and the availability of tickets.

The exodus of educated, liberal Russians threatens the country's long-term development in a brain drain that wouldn't be Russia's first. When the Soviet Union opened the door to greater Jewish emigration in the 1970s, many scientists, engineers and doctors left for Israel and the West.

After the torrent of Western sanctions hit Russia recently in response to Mr. Putin's invasion of Ukraine, a Russian man in his 50s who said he worked for a U.S. company watched anxiously as medicine disappeared off the shelves in Moscow. He managed to find a pharmacy that still stocked insulin, packed as much as he could carry, and took the train to Helsinki with his wife, from where they planned to fly to Germany to move in with their daughter, a student.

"We decided that if we missed this opportunity, it would be too late," he said as he waited in Helsinki airport.

Many Russians leaving the country belong to a sector of society that has long been critical of Mr. Putin. Back home, many others continue to support the president, partly due to intensified propaganda efforts in

recent years by Russian state media. Mr. Putin has justified his war on Ukraine by the need to “de-Nazify” its government, falsely claiming that Kyiv is controlled by a cabal of American-sponsored neo-Nazis.

Maxim Kuvykin, 54, said everywhere he looked in Moscow in recent days, he saw the letter “Z,” which the Russian government has used as a patriotic symbol to rally Russians around the invasion of Ukraine.

People around him were gradually “brainwashed,” including his mother who died shortly before the war started, Mr. Kuvykin said, during a 24-hour wait at Helsinki airport. After his mother’s funeral, he decided to settle in Israel, where he holds a passport due to being Jewish. “My mother read all the books in the world. But for the last five years, she watched a lot of TV. The propaganda really works,” Mr. Kuvykin said, tearing up.

“I knew for many years that Mr. Putin would be out of his mind and attack a neighbor,” he added. “Now I’m running away. I just don’t want to be a part of it.”

Even if they settle in countries in Europe, many Russians will still suffer the effect of sanctions. Visa Inc. and Mastercard Inc. said Saturday that they were suspending operations in Russia, rendering their credit cards useless outside the country. Representatives of Visa and Mastercard didn’t immediately respond to requests for comment.

The card companies’ move will likely mainly hurt ordinary Russians by choking their funds once they leave the country, rather than Mr. Putin or the oligarchs who got rich during his rule.

At the Finnish border, some remained defiant. Dasha Kirillova, a 55-year-old horse-club owner whose husband founded a street art museum in St. Petersburg, said she was carrying a wad of cash in her bag, which she would transfer to Ukrainian artists once she reached Dubai, where she was going to visit her daughter. She planned to return soon for her horses.

“But if we’re going to have North Korean conditions in our country, of course we’ll leave. I’ll take the horses to the Caucasus,” Ms. Kirillova said.

“Putin is a madman,” she said. “The scariest thing for me is that many people support him.”

Natan Kalt, a 36-year-old IT worker from Moscow, flew to Armenia after the outbreak of war but planned to move to neighboring Georgia, where he has friends. He doesn’t expect to return to Russia soon, fearing his opposition to Mr. Putin and the war would get him in trouble.

“I’m worried that the Gulag will come back,” Mr. Kalt said from Yerevan, where he was staying in a hotel full of Russian families.

Others expressed a deep sense of shame for what Mr. Putin was doing in their nation’s name.

“It’s a horror I haven’t experienced before in my life,” said a woman waiting for a flight at Helsinki airport. “I don’t know how I can look the world in the eyes.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 Inflation reaches new high in February?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-inflation-consumer-price-index-february-2022-11646857681?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	<p>U.S. inflation is estimated to have climbed to another four-decade high in February with skyrocketing energy and commodity prices related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine expected to push costs even higher.</p> <p>Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal expect that the Labor Department will report Thursday that the consumer-price index hit a 7.8% annual rate in February. The index for goods and services across</p>

the economy is measured throughout the month. Rising energy prices at the end of February would be accounted for in the inflation reading, but not March increases that put crude oil prices at their highest levels since 2008 and U.S. gasoline prices at record highs.

Excluding volatile energy and food prices, economists estimated consumer inflation rose at a 6.4% annual rate in February, up from 6% the prior month. The CPI measures what consumers pay for goods and services, including groceries, clothes, restaurant meals, recreation and vehicles.

Before the Ukraine crisis, economists and policy makers had been hoping for a peak in year-over-year inflation this spring as supply chains heal from pandemic-related disruptions and the Federal Reserve begins an expected series of interest rate increases next week. But the outbreak of war has supercharged prices for oil, wheat, and precious metals, threatening higher inflation for longer.

“We thought that inflation would come down, especially due to the untangling of the global supply chain, but we don’t know how what’s happening in Ukraine will re-tangle that,” said Joel Naroff, chief economist at Naroff Economics LLC.

Elevated inflation, prior to the war in Ukraine, was primarily driven by brisk demand for goods, shipping bottlenecks and shortages of supplies such as semiconductors. Fed officials were braced for a run of higher inflation to start the year, but recent trends have been higher than expected. Housing and food costs have risen sharply, and hints at moderating prices in the used-car market have been overshadowed by further disruptions in new automotive manufacturing.

Economic disruptions from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the global response could further stoke inflation, in part because Russia is a top global supplier of oil and natural gas. One rule of thumb, which Fed Chairman Jerome Powell referenced last week, holds that a \$10-per-barrel increase in oil prices boosts overall U.S. inflation by 0.2 percentage point. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, has increased by around \$40 a barrel since the start of the year. Russia also is a major player in global markets for metals used in the production of cars and airplanes and for components in fertilizer, a big expense in food production.

Because of Russia’s role in global energy and other commodity markets, “we’re going to see upward pressure on inflation at least for a while,” Mr. Powell told the Senate Banking Committee last week.

Mr. Powell has said he expects the central bank to raise rates by a quarter percentage point at its March 15-16 meeting with additional increases to follow later in the year. The plan was formulated ahead of the Ukraine invasion.

“I do think it’s going to be appropriate for us to proceed along the lines we had in mind before the Ukraine invasion happened,” Mr. Powell said. “In this very sensitive time at the moment, it’s important for us to be careful in the way we conduct policy simply because things are so uncertain and we don’t want to add to that uncertainty.”

On Sunday, the nation’s average gasoline price surpassed \$4 a gallon for the first time since 2008, according to AAA, which tracks retail prices daily. By Wednesday, prices had hit their highest level ever, unadjusted for inflation.

The surge in energy and commodity prices is the latest challenge for businesses that have had to test whether their customers are willing to pay higher prices for products and services.

John Merritt, vice president of Elaine Bell Catering in Napa, Calif., has been pleased to see the recovery of his business after a tough two years in which in-person events dried up and planning for the future seemed impossible. But the rising cost of labor and the lack of price stability for food and gas has hurt business.

“We’re able to pass some costs on to customers, but a lot of people were contracted at lower prices,” and rising costs have eaten up his profit margin, Mr. Merritt said.

To hedge against future price increases, Elaine Bell Catering has started to include an inflation rider in new contracts. “We’re giving them the best price we can if they were having their event today,” Mr. Merritt added. “But where we are booking things 18 months out commonly, we have to price this more like a long-term labor contract that has a CPI adjustment.”

Some economists believe that inflation is still likely to peak soon, perhaps as early as this month. But the war in Ukraine increases the chance that the peak will be higher, and the descent to lower levels will take longer, they say.

“Momentum on the supply-chain front is disrupted by the war,” said Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Oxford Economics. She has now raised her expectations for annual inflation at the end of 2022 to closer to 4% rather than 3%.

A primary worry for policy makers going forward is that higher wages will keep pressure on inflation by causing companies to raise prices to account for labor costs. Still, private-sector average hourly earnings rose a seasonally adjusted 5.1% in February from the previous year, lower than the rate of inflation.

Nitin Kumar, a Herndon, Va., resident who works at a financial technology company, was grateful to get a “substantial raise” at the beginning of 2022, but after seeing the rate of inflation, has questioned how far his money really goes. He is considering whether he should shop at a discount grocery store or take other cost-saving measures.

“I need to start considering things I can do myself—like walk more instead of driving,” Mr. Kumar said. “It’s not a sustainable practice to spend more.”

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HEADLINE	03/09 Florida fire spreads thru hurricane debris
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/florida-fire-grows-as-flames-spread-through-debris-from-hurricane-michael-11646860865?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>Firefighters began to make some headway on a large fire in the Florida Panhandle that was spreading through areas thick with dead trees and other growth left in the wake of Hurricane Michael.</p> <p>The Bertha Swamp Road Fire has burned more than 33,000 acres since it was sparked last Friday, according to the Florida Forest Service. The fire was 20% contained as of Wednesday afternoon, as rain allowed firefighters to push into areas that were previously inaccessible.</p> <p>Earlier efforts to tame the blaze had been complicated by what the forest service called “extreme fire behavior.” According to the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, extreme fire behavior is difficult to predict. Such fires can have a high rate of spread or flames that create their own weather systems, making the blaze’s movement erratic and more intense than normal wildfire.</p> <p>“This is a living, breathing beast, that’s the only way I can describe it,” Brad Monroe, chief of emergency services in Bay County, said Tuesday during a news conference with Gov. Ron DeSantis. “When it produces its own weather, you see lightning strikes within a fire on a bright sunny day, it’s incredible. Words cannot describe it.”</p> <p>The Bertha Swamp Road Fire is the largest of three distinct fires in the area, known as the Chipola Complex. All three fires are just east of Panama City and about 60 miles southwest of Tallahassee.</p> <p>The Bertha Fire started in Gulf County and has spread north into Calhoun and Bay counties.</p> <p>“Suppression efforts remain challenging as the fire pushes through thick, dry, and dead trees and vegetation left behind from Hurricane Michael,” the forest service said in a Wednesday morning update.</p>

	<p>That massive storm made landfall in October 2018 as a Category 5 hurricane, flattening houses, trees and power lines as it roared through the Panhandle.</p> <p>The 875-acre Adkins Avenue Fire was 85% contained, according to authorities. The much smaller Star Avenue Fire, estimated to be 197 acres, was also now 95% contained.</p> <p>“They’re at a phase where we can start mopping up,” Anthony Petellat, incident commander at the Florida Forest Service, said of the two fires at a press conference earlier this week. Mr. Petellat said residents who had evacuated were able to return home.</p> <p>Florida will give \$6.1 million to families affected by the fires, Mr. DeSantis said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Australia to boost size of military by 30%
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/australia-to-boost-size-of-military-intensifying-effort-to-counter-china-11646903670?mod=hp_listc_pos2
GIST	<p>SYDNEY—Australia will increase the size of its standing military by 30% to nearly 80,000 uniformed personnel, the latest step by the U.S. ally to beef up defenses amid growing competition between the U.S. and China in the Indo-Pacific region.</p> <p>The increase, which will take place gradually over the next two decades, will provide the manpower Australia needs for new sea, land, air and cyber operations. It comes as U.S. allies world-wide boost military spending in response to new threats from Russia and China, which recently entered into a friendship pact.</p> <p>The new personnel will eventually help Australia to operate its first nuclear-powered submarines, which it plans to acquire through the new AUKUS military partnership with the U.S. and the U.K. The extra manpower will also support new surface ships, information warfare, missile defense, satellite operations and a land-based, long-range strike capability.</p> <p>Overall, Australia will spend about \$28 billion through 2040 on the extra manpower, increasing its military from current levels of about 60,000 permanent personnel. The center-right government, led by Prime Minister Scott Morrison, has boosted military spending in recent years amid concerns that the armed forces were too small to respond to emerging threats, particularly as world powers including the U.S. and China focus more on the Indo-Pacific region.</p> <p>The extra manpower “provides a deterrence and it makes us a more credible partner with the United Kingdom, with the United States and with NATO, with Japan, with India and many other partners in the southwest Pacific,” Defense Minister Peter Dutton said, referring to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. “If we are to rely on them, they need to rely on us.”</p> <p>A 2020 strategic update from Australia’s defense department found that the prospect of high-intensity military conflict in the Indo-Pacific, though still remote, was less remote than in the past, and that so-called gray-zone activities—such as the use of paramilitary forces and coercive economic levers—were now more of a challenge.</p> <p>Relations between Australia and China deteriorated in 2020 after Mr. Morrison pushed for an international investigation into the origins of the coronavirus. Since then, China warned its citizens not to travel to Australia and placed restrictions or tariffs on certain Australian imports such as coal, barley and wine.</p> <p>Last month, Australia accused the Chinese navy of shining a military-grade laser at a surveillance plane flying over its territorial waters, the latest escalation in those tensions.</p> <p>Australia’s government had already spent time determining which extra capabilities it wanted, so figuring out how many more people the military needed for those operations was the next step, said Marcus</p>

Hellyer, a senior analyst at the government-backed Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Australia has joined allies in sanctioning Russia for its invasion of Ukraine and criticized Russian President Vladimir Putin, but Mr. Hellyer said a need to counter China was the driving force behind Australia's military expansion.

"It's showing that the U.S.'s allies in the Indo-Pacific get the issue, that people need to be doing more," said Mr. Hellyer, a former senior public servant in Australia's defense department. "The Australian government has prided itself in taking the lead in that regard."

Mr. Morrison said Thursday that Australia spends 2.1% of its gross domestic product on the military, up from 1.9% when he took office more than three years ago. Australia isn't a member of NATO, the U.S.-led military alliance focused on Europe, but that exceeds the 2% target for NATO members. Other U.S. allies, including Germany and Japan, have also recently said they would increase military spending.

Mr. Morrison, who will face an election likely in May and is trailing in the polls, has made national security a pillar of his campaign. This week, he announced Australia would spend more than \$7 billion on preparing for the nuclear-powered submarines, including the establishment of a submarine base on its east coast that would be able to host visiting U.S. vessels. On Thursday, he criticized the center-left Labor Party, his chief opponent, for cutting military spending when it was in power.

Anthony Albanese, the Labor Party leader, said he supports the development of nuclear-powered submarines and that, if elected, his party would make sure the military has the resources it needs to defend Australia. But he said Mr. Morrison's recent announcements, including about the submarine base, are more about electioneering than actual progress.

"The Morrison government has been dropping hints about submarines, but offered no clarity," Mr. Albanese said Thursday.

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HEADLINE	03/09 Officials warn: fast-rising civilian toll
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/09/russian-airstrike-hospital/
GIST	<p>MUKACHEVO, Ukraine — A Russian airstrike hit a Ukrainian maternity hospital in the besieged coastal city of Mariupol on Wednesday, injuring at least 17 staff members and patients as leaders warned of the fast-rising civilian toll of the two-week-old conflict, officials said.</p> <p>The blast tore the front off one of the buildings in the hospital complex and damaged several others. One pregnant woman was evacuated on a stretcher; a long bleeding gash on her left hip was visible in images from the scene. Another pregnant woman, bleeding from her forehead, walked down a staircase, a faded rose-print blanket draped over her shoulders, her possessions in a purple plastic bag. A flaming car sat on a square that was punctuated with gnarled, burned trees.</p> <p>"What kind of country is this, Russia, which is afraid of hospitals and maternity hospitals and destroys them?" Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a late-night video, appearing close to tears. "Were pregnant women going to fire at [the Russian city of] Rostov? Did someone in the maternity hospital abuse Russian-speakers? What was that? Was it the de-Nazification of the hospital?"</p> <p>The bombing punctuated another devastating day in Ukraine, where leaders made increasingly desperate calls for more Western help, while U.S. officials warned that Russia seemed to be launching more indiscriminate attacks and making small but strategic gains on key cities. U.S. officials also warned that Russian rhetoric about chemical weapons could mean they were plotting a "false-flag" attack.</p> <p>Officials feared that the coming days could be particularly grim for refugees and Ukrainians who have camped out in basements and subway stations to try to avoid Russian bombing. The United Nations said Wednesday it had recorded 516 civilian deaths, including 37 children, in the fighting so far, but it said in a statement that "the real figures are considerably higher."</p>

The governor of the region that includes Mariupol, Pavlo Kyrylenko, said in a video posted on Telegram that the 17 injured people in the Mariupol attack were mostly staff members and that no children were hurt. It was not immediately clear how full the hospital was when it was hit, with Mariupol encircled by Russian forces and city life largely having come to a halt. Patients appeared to have been using at least a portion of the aboveground maternity wards.

The attack drew immediate global condemnation, along with promises of more support for the embattled country.

“There are few things more depraved than targeting the vulnerable and defenceless,” British Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrote on Twitter.

The World Health Organization said earlier Wednesday it had so far verified 18 attacks on health facilities in Ukraine. The attacks inflicted 10 deaths and 16 injuries, the organization said.

“These attacks deprive whole communities of health care,” said WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The Russian military appears to be throwing inexperienced soldiers into combat, acknowledging Wednesday that at least some conscripted soldiers had been sent into battle despite Russian President Vladimir Putin’s orders to leave the fighting to professionals. Putin on Wednesday ordered military prosecutors to investigate who was responsible for disobeying the order, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Adding to worries about an escalation, White House press secretary Jen Psaki warned that Russia may be planning a “false-flag” chemical weapons attack, after Russian officials claimed to have evidence that the United States had supported a bioweapons program in Ukraine, and that “Ukrainian nationalists” were readying a chemical weapons “provocation” close to the Russian border near Kharkiv. U.S. officials dismissed the accusation.

“Now that Russia has made these false claims,” Psaki said on Twitter, “we should all be on the lookout for Russia to possibly use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine, or to create a false flag operation using them.”

There were fears that the scale of the human suffering could grow even more if Ukraine’s nuclear facilities failed as a result of the fighting. Ukraine’s power grid operator, Ukrenergo, warned Wednesday that the closed Chernobyl nuclear power plant had been disconnected from the grid and that there were just 48 hours of fuel left for the diesel backup generators that keep the cooling and ventilation systems at the plant operational.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba demanded a cease-fire with Russia so repairs could be made, warning that after reserve diesel generators run out of fuel, “cooling systems of the storage facility for spent nuclear fuel will stop, making radiation leaks imminent.” The International Atomic Energy Agency was slightly less urgent, saying Wednesday on Twitter that the power loss “violates [a] key safety pillar on ensuring uninterrupted power supply” but adding that “in this case IAEA sees no critical impact on safety.”

Both Russia and Ukraine announced routes to allow people to leave hard-hit cities. But after accusing Putin’s forces of shelling the escape routes four days in a row, Ukrainian officials remained skeptical about the temporary cease-fire announcements.

Officials in Izyum, one of the cities set to be evacuated, alleged Wednesday that efforts to get civilians out were compromised by shelling from Russian forces. Other evacuations appeared to be proceeding. Local officials in the northeastern Sumy region, from which 5,000 people were able to evacuate a day earlier, said people were leaving in private cars and that they planned to load 22 buses, prioritizing pregnant women, women with children, older people and people with disabilities.

By Friday morning, much of Ukraine could be hovering around 14 degrees Fahrenheit, with gusty winds from the east that make the air feel even more bitter. And parts of northeastern Ukraine could get up to four inches of snow through Friday. The bitter temperatures are expected to make the situation in the country more difficult — for soldiers and civilians alike.

A senior U.S. defense official, speaking on the condition of anonymity under rules set by the Pentagon, said Wednesday that Russia's military campaign [appears to be growing more indiscriminate as its troops make small but strategic gains on key cities](#).

There are "indications" the Russians are dropping "dumb munitions," the official said, but added that it was "not totally clear whether that is by design" or because precision-guided munitions were somehow damaged.

"While we can't prove a certain dumb bomb is hitting a certain target ... what we see manifested is increasing damage to civilian infrastructure and civilian casualties," the official said. Avoiding such casualties, the official added, "cannot be aided by the use of dumb bombs."

The Biden administration has been adamant that it will not involve U.S. troops in the war and thus far has dismissed calls from Zelensky and others to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine, saying enforcement could risk putting U.S. and NATO military personnel in direct conflict with Russian forces. But as the advance on major cities continues, the humanitarian situation is becoming more dire — particularly in places like Mariupol, which, according to the defense official, is now "isolated."

Russia has launched more than 710 missiles, about half of which were fired from locations within Ukraine, according to the defense official. In the last 24 hours, Russian troops also made gains in their assault on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest population center, moving 20 kilometers closer to the center of the city in the country's northeast. Russian forces also have moved about 15 kilometers to the north of Mykolaiv in southern Ukraine, according to a U.S. assessment, representing another territorial gain.

What are cluster and thermobaric 'vacuum' weapons, and how has Russia used them in the past?

If the southern city falls, it could become a staging ground for a Russian assault on the large port city of Odessa, the defense official said.

The Pentagon believes Ukraine still has the bulk of its fixed-wing aircraft "available to them and operational," the official said, but the Russians have surface-to-air missile systems that "virtually cover the whole country."

"One has to assume they're taking that into effect before they decide to fly manned aircraft," the U.S. defense official said.

That posture appears to have been driving some skepticism in the United States about the logic of sending Ukraine more attack aircraft, as Poland has been pressing to do. On Tuesday night, the United States rejected a Polish proposal to move MiG-29 warplanes to a U.S. base in Germany so they could be deployed to aid Ukraine at the United States' direction.

Psaki reiterated Wednesday that there "obvious concerns" with such a plan.

"It doesn't require a military expert to understand why having planes fly from a U.S. air base into ... a country where there is a war is not in our interests and not in NATO's interests," she said.

Psaki also cited problems with alternative suggestions for transporting those planes from Poland into Ukraine. "Carting them down the street," she said, was not as easy as people might think.

	<p>“They have to be taken apart and put back together,” Psaki said. “You have to have people who are able to put those planes back together. You have to ensure that they can be safely moved through the course of a contested country.”</p> <p>But U.S. officials also acknowledged that Ukrainian leaders may feel the need to press for whatever assistance they can get.</p> <p>“If I were in President Zelensky’s position, I’m sure I would be asking for everything possible ... to help the Ukrainian people,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said at a news conference with visiting British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss.</p> <p>Truss was more direct in her skepticism.</p> <p>“The best way to defend” Ukraine, she said, is “with antitank weapons and anti-air weapons.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Russia use chemical, biological weapons?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/10/ukraine-russia-disinformation-us-biolabs-chemical-weapons/
GIST	<p>The Biden administration warned Wednesday that Russia could use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine, as it rejected Russia’s claims that U.S. biological weapons labs are operating in the war-torn country.</p> <p>White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Wednesday called Russia’s claims “preposterous” and warned of “disinformation” campaigns.</p> <p>“We took note of Russia’s false claims about alleged U.S. biological weapons labs and chemical weapons development in Ukraine,” she tweeted. “We’ve also seen Chinese officials echo these conspiracy theories.”</p> <p>Psaki said the United States was in “full compliance” with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention, which bar countries from developing or possessing such weapons.</p> <p>She said Russia has long “maintained a biological weapons program in violation of international law” and cited its military intervention in Syria in support of the Bashar al-Assad regime and its suspected poisoning of Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny in 2020 with a Novichok-like nerve agent.</p> <p>“Now that Russia has made these false claims, and China has seemingly endorsed this propaganda, we should all be on the lookout for Russia to possibly use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine, or to create a false-flag operation using them. It’s a clear pattern,” she added.</p> <p>Psaki made the comments after Russian officials accused the United States of developing such weapons in Ukraine.</p> <p>Igor Konashenkov, the chief spokesman for Russia’s Defense Ministry, said it was “obvious that in the wake of the special military operation, the Pentagon started having serious concerns about secret biological experiments uncovered on the Ukrainian territory.”</p> <p>Dmitry Chumakov, a Russian deputy United Nations ambassador, urged Western media on Wednesday to cover “the news about secret biological laboratories in Ukraine,” the Associated Press reported.</p> <p>Kremlin spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also told reporters Wednesday that Russia had concluded that “in Ukrainian laboratories close to our borders, components of biological weapons were being developed.”</p>

	<p>Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.), who recently voted against a House resolution supporting Ukraine, amplified Russia's claims Wednesday on Twitter, saying he had not taken "the concern over Ukrainian biological labs seriously ... until now."</p> <p>On Thursday, Britain's armed forces minister, James Heappey, told the BBC that if Russian President Vladimir Putin did seek to use chemical weapons, he should expect an "international response." Heappey did not say whether he meant from NATO or individual countries.</p> <p>The British minister said he had read "very high-level intelligence" last week about the possibility of Russia using chemical weapons and praised the United States for making public its intelligence on the issue as a deterrent to Moscow.</p> <p>"President Putin needs to be clear that the use of chemical weapons is just the most despicable thing that anybody can imagine," Heappey said.</p> <p>"I don't think it's helpful to get into any firm commitment right now about where that red line sits. But I think President Putin needs to be very clear that when other countries have used chemical weapons, it has caused an international response," he added.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 UK freezes assets 7 Russia oligarchs
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/10/uk-freezes-assets-of-russian-oligarchs-including-roman-abramovich
GIST	<p>Britain said on Thursday it had imposed asset freezes on seven Russian businessmen including Roman Abramovich, Igor Sechin, Oleg Deripaska, Andrey Kostin, Alexei Miller, Nikolai Tokarev and Dmitri Lebedev after they were added to the country's sanctions list.</p> <p>The prime minister, Boris Johnson, said: "There can be no safe havens for those who have supported Putin's vicious assault on Ukraine."</p> <p>"Today's sanctions are the latest step in the UK's unwavering support for the Ukrainian people. We will be ruthless in pursuing those who enable the killing of civilians, destruction of hospitals and illegal occupation of sovereign allies."</p> <p>The culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, tweeted. "Our priority is to hold those who have enabled the Putin regime to account. Today's sanctions obviously have a direct impact on Chelsea & its fans. We have been working hard to ensure the club & the national game are not unnecessarily harmed by these important sanctions."</p> <p>"To ensure the club can continue to compete and operate we are issuing a special licence that will allow fixtures to be fulfilled, staff to be paid and existing ticket holders to attend matches while, crucially, depriving Abramovich of benefiting from his ownership of the club."</p> <p>"I know this brings some uncertainty, but the government will work with the league & clubs to keep football being played while ensuring sanctions hit those intended. Football clubs are cultural assets and the bedrock of our communities. We're committed to protecting them."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 IMF \$1.4B emergency support for Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/10/imf-approves-emergency-support-ukraine-russia-invasion
GIST	The International Monetary Fund has approved \$1.4bn in emergency financing for Ukraine to help meet urgent spending needs and mitigate the economic impact of Russia's military invasion.

	<p>The global lender said Ukrainian authorities had cancelled an existing standby lending arrangement with the IMF but they would work together to design an appropriate economic programme focused on rehabilitation and growth when conditions permitted.</p> <p>“The Russian military invasion of Ukraine has been responsible for a massive humanitarian and economic crisis,” the IMF managing director, Kristalina Georgieva, said after the meeting, predicting a deep recession in Ukraine this year.</p> <p>“Financing needs are large, urgent, and could rise significantly as the war continues,” she said. Once the war was over, Ukraine was likely to need additional “large support”.</p> <p>Vladyslav Rashkovan, Ukraine’s alternate executive director at the IMF, gave an emotional and deeply personal speech at the board meeting about the devastation caused by the war and its impact on its people, a source familiar with the meeting said.</p> <p>His remarks were met with spontaneous applause, a rare event at such meetings. In its statement on the new funding, the Russian executive director, Aleksei Mozhin, who is the board’s most senior member and serves as its honorary dean, spoke only briefly, telling members: “I pray for peace,” the source said.</p> <p>The IMF said the war had resulted in very serious consequences, citing the departure of more than 2 million people from the country in 13 days and destruction of key infrastructure. Russia calls the assault a “special military operation”.</p> <p>The disbursement under the IMF’s rapid financing instrument (RFI), equivalent to 50% of Ukraine’s quota in the IMF, would help fund urgent spending needs in the short term, while helping to catalyse financing from other partners, the IMF said.</p> <p>The RFI provides rapid funding to IMF member countries without the need for a fully fledged programme. Members can tap the RFI repeatedly within any three-year period if the balance of payments need is caused by an exogenous shock, according to the IMF website.</p> <p>It comes on top of \$700m disbursed to Ukraine by the IMF in December, and \$2.7bn in IMF special drawing rights, or emergency reserves, that Ukraine received as part of an IMF allocation in August.</p> <p>The World Bank’s executive board on Monday approved a \$723m package of loans and grants for Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/10 Mariupol hospital bombing called genocide
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/10/ukraine-president-zelenskiy-decries-mariupol-childrens-maternity-hospital-bombing-genocide-as-us-13bn-aid-bill-passes-first-hurdle
GIST	<p>Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy condemned a Russian attack on a children’s hospital in the besieged city of Mariupol as evidence of “genocide” as the US moved to drastically bolster support to the war-ravaged country with a \$13.6bn aid package.</p> <p>The Ukrainian president shared video footage showing massive destruction at the hospital – a combined 600-bed complex with children’s and maternity wards – in the southern port city that has been under relentless bombardment for nine days.</p> <p>“A children’s hospital, a maternity ward. How did they threaten the Russian Federation? What is this country, the Russian Federation, that is afraid of hospitals, maternity wards and is destroying them?” said Zelenskiy on Telegram.</p>

“Hospitals and schools are destroyed. Churches and ordinary buildings are destroyed. People are killed. Children are killed. The aerial bombing of a children’s hospital is the ultimate evidence that genocide of Ukrainians is happening.”

The White House condemned the attack as “barbaric” while US House lawmakers voted to rush through a \$13.6bn aid package that would increase military and humanitarian support to Ukraine and its European allies. The aid includes \$6.5bn for the US costs of sending troops and weapons to eastern Europe and equipping allied forces there, and \$6.8bn to care for refugees and provide economic support to allies. Senate approval is expected within days. The House also passed a bill banning Russia oil imports.

US House speaker Nancy Pelosi said she talked to Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy for 45 minutes on Wednesday. She said they discussed the weapons and other assistance his country needs and “the crimes against humanity that [Vladimir] Putin is committing”, including the maternity hospital air strike. “This is the beast that Putin is,” Pelosi said.

Pelosi indicated the \$13.6bn US aid package was likely to be just the tip of a much broader aid effort. “All of us will have to do more” to help Ukraine in coming weeks or months and over the long term to help it rebuild, Pelosi said, referring to the US and Nato allies.

The US meanwhile warned Russia could be preparing to use chemical or biological weapons in the war. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday that Russia had been making “false claims about alleged US biological weapons labs and chemical weapons development in Ukraine”, and added that the allegations had been echoed in Beijing.

“Now that Russia has made these false claims, and China has seemingly endorsed this propaganda, we should all be on the lookout for Russia to possibly use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine, or to create a false flag operation using them,” she tweeted.

The concerns came as UK intelligence highlighted the strength of the Ukrainian resistance. In an update on Thursday, Britain’s Ministry of Defence (MoD) said the large Russian column north-west of Kyiv had made “little progress in over a week” and suffers continued losses at the hands of Ukraine forces. The MoD said there had been a noticeable drop in Russian air activity in recent days, likely due to the “unexpected effectiveness” of the Ukraine forces. It also said Russia has deployed conscript troops despite assurances from Putin not to do so.

As the Russian president seeks to regain momentum, local authorities described the damage to the Mariupol hospital as “colossal” and said women in labour were among the wounded.

A local official said the attack injured at least 17 staff, though no deaths were immediately reported. Zelenskiy said the “direct strike by Russian troops” had left children under the wreckage.

The deputy mayor, Sergei Orlov, said Mariupol was being shelled continuously and 1,170 residents had died, 47 of whom were buried in a mass grave on Wednesday. “It’s medieval,” he said. “It’s pure genocide. The attack isn’t simply treacherous. It’s a war crime. They are attacking us with aviation, shells, multiple rocket launchers.”

The Guardian was unable to fully verify the Ukrainian officials’ accounts, but video published by the Associated Press showed multiple injured people at the site of the hospital attack.

The Red Cross has described conditions in the port city as “apocalyptic”, while deputy prime minister Iryna Vereshchuk said the situation was “catastrophic”. Zelenskiy compared the devastation and suffering there to that caused by the Nazis.

Journalists have described corpses lying unburied in the streets and hungry residents breaking into stores in search of food, and melting snow for water while thousands sheltered in basements.

The Russian army had also “shot and bombed” a humanitarian corridor agreed with Moscow and intended to allow civilians a safe route out, the deputy mayor of the city said, mined the road, and installed a checkpoint. Of an estimated 200,000 people desperate to leave, only 2,000 to 3,000 a day were able to.

On Wednesday, Zelenskiy said at least 35,000 civilians were able to leave the cities of Sumy, Enerhodar and areas around Kyiv. He said he hoped the evacuations would continue on Thursday with three more routes set to open out of Mariupol, Volnovakha in the south-east and Izyum in eastern Ukraine.

Zelenskiy said on Wednesday the threat level against the country was “at the maximum” and again called on the west to impose a no-fly zone, saying it risked a “humanitarian catastrophe” if it did not.

Speaking in Washington, the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, and British foreign secretary, Liz Truss, reiterated the Nato position that a no-fly zone would bring Nato into direct conflict with Russia.

The conflict has also raised fears of a nuclear accident in a country with major nuclear plants and the site of the Chernobyl disaster. The UN’s atomic watchdog said Wednesday it saw “no critical impact on safety” at Chernobyl, location of the world’s worst nuclear disaster in 1986, despite a loss of power there.

But it warned it was not receiving updates from either Chernobyl or Zaporizhzhia, Europe’s largest nuclear plant, which is also now under Russian control.

The UK said the Russians had confirmed the use of a thermobaric rocket system. The weapons, also known as vacuum bombs, suck in oxygen from the surrounding air to generate a high-temperature explosion.

Three rounds of peace talks between the two sides have so far yielded no progress, with Moscow continuing to insist Ukraine must “demilitarise” and enshrine neutrality in its constitution before it halts what it calls a “special military operation” aimed at ensuring Russia’s security. Moscow insisted on Wednesday it would prefer to reach its goals through negotiation.

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HEADLINE	03/09 Mariupol annihilated by Russia attacks
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/pure-genocide-civilian-targets-in-mariupol-annihilated-by-russian-attacks
GIST	<p>Speaking via a blurry video connection, the deputy mayor of Mariupol painted a grim picture of life and death on Wednesday inside his besieged city.</p> <p>Russian forces surrounded Mariupol a week ago. They have been shelling it “continuously” ever since, Sergiy Orlov said, in a call with the Guardian and other foreign media.</p> <p>“They have used aviation, artillery, multiple rocket launchers, grads and other types of weapons we don’t even know about. This isn’t simply treacherous. It’s a war crime and pure genocide,” he said.</p> <p>He added: “Vladimir Putin means to capture Mariupol whatever the human cost.”</p> <p>By way of evidence, Orlov reeled off a list of civilian targets he said had so far been “annihilated”. They included numerous residential houses, Mariupol’s 600-bed maternity hospital No 9, the main administration service building, and the city’s giant Avostal metallurgical factory – once the workplace for 11,000 people.</p> <p>He said 1,170 people had been killed. On Wednesday, municipal workers buried 47 victims in a mass grave.</p> <p>“We couldn’t identify all of them,” Orlov said. The message from Moscow was chillingly clear, he suggested: “Putin intends to destroy Ukraine so he can have Ukraine without Ukrainians.”</p>

Putin's goals, he said, were proceeding at a terrifying pace. The city has spent the last eight days without heat, power, gas, or electricity. Russians parked up in tanks and armoured vehicles on Mariupol's coastal outskirts had bombed all 15 power lines, Orlov said. On Monday, they blew up the gas connection.

"We sent a team of workers to repair the line. The Russians immediately shelled them. They had to leave," he said.

Consequently, the city's 400,000 residents were living in freezing "medieval conditions", unthinkable in what was until two weeks ago a modern and "flourishing" city, with busy cafes and restaurants.

"The only way civilians can cook now is on open fires. People are fighting over firewood. They are happy that it's cold and snowing. Snow means they have something to drink."

"A six-year-old girl died of dehydration," Orlov continued bitterly. "This is Europe, in 2022. How can that happen?" He added: "A lot of districts are devastated. They are dropping half-tonne bombs from the sky."

Mariupol is one of several Ukrainian cities where Russia has promised to open so-called humanitarian corridors. The reality was the reverse, Orlov said. For the past five days Russia had shelled the agreed route and had even mined the road. It had set up a new checkpoint, he claimed, making evacuation to Zaporizhzhia – a city to the west under Ukrainian control – impossible.

The deputy mayor estimated about 200,000 people wanted to get out of Mariupol. The authorities were only able to take out about 2,000 to 3,000 residents a day, he said, on a battered fleet of 21 municipal buses. The Russians had flattened the others. They targeted the assembly evacuation points, with citizens understandably reluctant to leave their shelters.

Putin's apparent dream of a "Russian world" minus Ukrainians was the product of a "sick imagination", he said.

He pointed out that Mariupol had always been a diverse multicultural city, home to Ukrainian and Russian speakers as well as ethnic Greeks and Armenians. All were Ukrainian citizens, he said, adding that nobody cared what language you spoke.

"Half of those killed by Russian bombing are Russian-origin Ukrainians. This is Putin's 'peace'," he said sardonically. The Ukrainian army would defend Mariupol until the last man, he said. If it did ultimately fall it would become a "ghost place", he predicted, adding: "There is no Russian Mariupol. It's going to be a desert."

From Kyiv, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, tweeted photos of the airstrike on Wednesday at Mariupol's maternity hospital and said people and children lay buried under the wreckage. The Guardian was unable to verify the allegation, but video published by the Associated Press showed several injured people at the site of the hospital attack.

Zelenskiy renewed his call – so far denied by Nato – for an immediate no-fly zone over Ukraine's skies. The world was "losing its humanity", he wrote.

Other photos taken from inside Mariupol over the past two days confirm a humanitarian disaster is taking place, with the EU, the US and the UK seemingly able to do nothing.

They show blackened and destroyed apartment buildings, several still smouldering; burnt-out cars; and streets filled with debris. Bodies lay on pavements covered by rugs or sheets.

Local authorities still control the city centre. The worst shelling has taken place in western districts closest to Russian troops including Primorskiy and the port area, once home to Ukraine's small Sea of Azov naval

fleet. With little food left, desperate civilians have started looting shops, smashing glass and clambering through windows.

The city has distributed bottled water to women and children. Orlov said supplies of formula milk had run out, with about 3,000 babies unfed. Families are sleeping in freezing cellars. A few residents are able to charge mobile phones on city council generators. But for most, contact with the outside world has stopped.

[Writing on Facebook](#), Mariupol resident Angela Timchenko said there was “no electricity, no communication, no gas, no medical care and no food. Looting is on the rise. There are crazy mums looking for food and nappies. Let’s help each other whenever possible.”

She added: “Yesterday I was in the city. There were bonfires burning near all the houses and food was being prepared ... to all who left our children to die, burn in hell. I heard a little boy ask his mum: ‘Will the rockets spark today?’”

Timchenko said she had lost 3.5kg and was running back and forth from her apartment on the eighth floor of a Mariupol block, where she lived with her family. “The baby understands if you raise your voice a little we need to run for cover,” [she wrote](#) poignantly.

A few days ago, an activist Anatoliy Lozar had described conditions in Mariupol as “hell”. The city had become a new Stalingrad, he said. On Wednesday, calls to his two phones failed to connect. Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine’s foreign minister, said Mariupol was “besieged by Russian invaders” and in dire need of help.

“Mariupol is on the edge of humanitarian catastrophe. No humanitarian convoy can get to the city left without water, heating & electricity,” he tweeted.

The humanitarian corridor did function in the north-eastern city of Sumy, where civilians were able to leave for a second day in a row. They were able to exit in private cars. [Several hundred international students trapped by the fighting](#) left on Tuesday in buses for Poltava, west of Kharkiv.

For those who remained in Sumy conditions were grim. Its mayor Oleksandr Lysenko said since Monday Russia had carried out four indiscriminate bombing raids, which killed civilians and children.

The latest attack in the darkness of Wednesday morning targeted a downtown residential area. “We managed to dig six people out, still alive, and a dog,” Lysenko said.

Two convoys had managed to leave on Tuesday and were allowed to go through an enemy cordon. But the Russians used the second convoy as a human shield in order to advance their tanks, he said.

“They shoot at civilian cars. Some cars get through, others don’t,” he said. “It’s a matter of luck.”

He added: “They shoot at civilians trying to flee. The Russians have no humanity.”

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HEADLINE	03/09 Fears: Russia readies chemical weapons
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/britain-fears-russia-could-be-setting-stage-to-use-chemical-weapons
GIST	<p>Britain and the US fear Russia could be setting the stage to use a chemical weapon in Ukraine after Kremlin officials alleged without firm evidence that the US had been supporting a bioweapons programme in the country.</p> <p>White House press secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday that Russia had been making “false claims about alleged US biological weapons labs and chemical weapons development in Ukraine”, and added that the allegations had been echoed in Beijing.</p>

“Now that Russia has made these false claims, and China has seemingly endorsed this propaganda, we should all be on the lookout for Russia to possibly use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine, or to create a false flag operation using them,” she tweeted.

Her comments came after western officials said at a briefing “we’ve got good reason to be concerned about possible use of non-conventional weapons” by Russia, reflecting the experience of chemical weapon use during the Syrian civil war.

The concern arose partly because Russia’s foreign ministry had been engaged in “setting the scene” by making “false flag claims” about a biological weapons programme operating inside Ukraine.

Earlier on Wednesday, Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said Russia had documents showing evidence that the US had supported a bioweapons programme in Ukraine, involving plague, cholera and anthrax. Washington and Kyiv both denied the claims, which Psaki described as “preposterous”.

Separately, Russia’s defence ministry accused “Ukrainian nationalists” of preparing a chemical weapons “provocation” in a village north-west of Kharkiv. The plan was to falsely accuse Russian forces of using chemical weapons, the ministry added.

“Russia has a track record of accusing the west of the very violations that Russia itself is perpetrating,” Psaki tweeted. “This is all an obvious ploy by Russia to try to justify its further premeditated, unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine.”

Western officials have repeatedly made warnings about Russia’s possible use of particularly lethal weapons over the past two weeks, such as thermobaric vacuum bombs which cause severe damage to human bodies because of the intensity of their explosive blasts.

Such high-profile warnings from the west are as much designed to have a deterrent effect as they are based on any assessment that such weapons will actually be used.

But Russia has shown an apparent willingness to target civilians in Ukrainian cities such as Kharkiv and Mariupol, as its initial invasion was slow in making progress.

Direct attacks on civilians or civilian infrastructure are considered war crimes. The development, production and stockpiling and use of chemical weapons is banned by an international treaty signed by 193 countries.

Chemical weapons have nevertheless been used on at least 17 occasions during Syria’s civil war, according to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which has accused the Russian-backed regime of Bashar al-Assad of being behind several high-profile attacks.

In recent years, however, Russia, has sought to deny that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons – and in April 2018, without supporting evidence, accused Britain of being behind a chlorine attack in Douma that killed 40.

But the fact that the chemical weapons involved were delivered through airstrikes led the OPCW to conclude the Syrian air force was responsible.

Western officials believe that Russia’s military advance has been “very slow” in recent days, because of greater than expected Ukrainian resistance and poor planning and logistics on the part of Moscow. But they accept Russian forces are making gradual progress, and are trying to “tighten the noose” around Kyiv, the capital.

	<p>One official said they believe the Russian army was “re-posturing and trying to learn lessons” as its forces advanced toward Kyiv from the east while also remaining in position to the north-west of the city.</p> <p>An attack on Kyiv would be “absolutely horrific” but no timeframe was put on whether it would be possible.</p> <p>Earlier this week, the Institute for the Study of War, a US thinktank, said it believed Russian forces were gradually building up for an attack on Kyiv “in the coming 24-96 hours”.</p> <p>But it remains unclear if Moscow can concentrate enough force to begin an attack on the capital, which before the war had a population of 3 million.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Russia’s warning sounds just like in Syria
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/russias-warning-of-ukraines-biological-weapons-sounds-just-like-syria
GIST	<p>When a Russian spokesperson took to a podium in Moscow on Wednesday and warned of a “biological weapons programme” in Ukraine, fighters on another battlefield – Syria – understood what she meant.</p> <p>The anti-Assad opposition groups that still held northern Syria had heard it all before. From 2015, when Russia took a prominent stake in the conflict, and throughout the gruesome years that followed, claims that they, instead of the Assad regime, had used chemical weapons were a ready-made slur that put them on notice of an imminent assault. The allegations were made by Moscow, whenever ground forces it was supporting wanted to clear a town or city. Brutal, indiscriminate bombardment followed. So did impunity.</p> <p>Even in its infancy, the Russian war in Ukraine has many parallels with the conflict in Syria: barely restrained savagery, the mass flight of terrified civilians, and wanton destruction. Now the use of foreboding pretexts can be added to a growing list, which was born amid the ruins of Grozny, Crimea and Donbas and fine-tuned on the civilian population of Syria’s beleaguered north.</p> <p>The Pentagon and Ukraine’s leadership both disdainfully denied the Russian claim, which had been accompanied by a call for answers, and there seemed little likelihood of it cutting through an international discourse that has run heavily against the Kremlin and its disinformation programmes.</p> <p>It was a very different story in Syria, where each claim of chemical weapons use by rebels was received with credulity in parts of the UK and Europe and there was little interest in exposing Moscow’s lies. Winning the war of misinformation was a Russian success in Syria, in a theatre that wasn’t short of wins for a military with no one apart from outgunned rebels and jihadists willing to stand in its way.</p> <p>“Ukraine today is part of a much longer continuum than Syria,” a former senior Nato officer told the Guardian. “It goes back further than Chechnya – politically, in terms of foreign policy, in terms of Russia’s internal dynamics and in terms of the tactics of the Russian war machine. The only surprise over the past fortnight is quite how useless the Russian armed forces have been – thankfully. They have been utterly dire in every respect, which is very good news all round.</p> <p>“We are all victims of our experience, and Putin’s experience is of being able to get away with almost anything he wants in every dimension of warfare. The blatant fostering of frozen conflicts in high-profile nations such as Georgia and Ukraine, the widespread and hardly concealed undermining of governance through hybrid warfare, the use of the most brutal tactics, crushing of whole towns and cities along with their populations.</p>

“His experience is that you can grind out a win using heavy explosives in the full glare of western media attention. And with an extremely effective control of his own [patriotic] population, he has little to fear at home.”

Compared with the quagmire it has found in Ukraine and the blistering international reaction to its invasion, Syria was a relatively low-cost intervention for Moscow. Its pilots ran bombing runs without serious fear of being shot from the skies, its heavy weaponry had the run of towns and cities and its disinformation machine won at a canter.

“The scope of the Ukraine war is different,” said Charles Lister, the director of the Syria and counter-terrorism programme at the Middle East Institute. “But some of the tactics were definitely learned and deployed in Syria.

“The broad assumption of impunity unquestionably drove this forward and put Putin in a psychological position where he believed something like this was feasible. He learned to pay no regard to international red lines. The sustained and overwhelming use of heavy bombardment aimed at undermining public confidence and as a tool of intimidation now being seen in Mariupol was honed in Syria, where Russia barely used precision-guided munitions.

“The vast majority have been dumb bombs. To use these, they need to fly at a lower level. And that’s why we are seeing Russian planes shot down, by Stingers and other ground-to-air missiles that were not supplied to the rebels in Syria.”

Another parallel has emerged in recent days – an often cynical use of human corridors as tools of coercion. “It is the shock and awe effect on the population, and one that leads to a greater number of war crimes.

“We saw this in Aleppo and now we are seeing it in places like Mariupol. It is clearly a tactic of intimidation and subjugation. ... In both cases, it’s shell to hell, surround and besiege, then shell to hell again and offer concessions.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 Day 15 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/10/russia-ukraine-war-update-what-we-know-on-day-15-of-the-russian-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy called the Russian strike on a maternity hospital in Mariupol “the ultimate evidence of genocide”. The children’s hospital and maternity ward in the southern Ukrainian city was destroyed by a Russian airstrike on Wednesday afternoon, Ukrainian officials said. Zelenskiy said children are buried under rubble and the regional governor said 17 people have been wounded. “A children’s hospital, a maternity ward. How did they threaten the Russian Federation?” Zelenskiy added. The Guardian was unable to fully verify Ukrainian officials’ accounts, but video published by the Associated Press showed multiple injured people at the site of the hospital attack.• Western officials warned of their “serious concern” that Vladimir Putin could use chemical weapons on Kyiv. In an assessment, they said an “utterly horrific” attack on the Ukrainian capital could be unleashed as Russian forces attempt to overcome the logistical issues that have apparently plagued troops headed towards Kyiv.• Britain’s Ministry of Defence (MoD) said the large Russian column north-west of Kyiv has made “little progress in over a week” and suffers continued losses at the hands of Ukraine forces. In an update on Thursday, the MoD said there had been a noticeable drop in Russian air activity in recent days, likely due to the “unexpected effectiveness” of the Ukraine resistance. It also said Russia has deployed conscript troops despite assurances from Putin not to do so.• Britain is planning to supply Starstreak anti-aircraft weapons and “a small consignment” of Javelin anti-tank missiles to Ukraine as Russian forces close in on Kyiv, the British defence secretary has said.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov has landed in Turkey for the face-to-face talks on Thursday with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba, the highest-level meeting between the two countries since Russia invaded. Kuleba warned in a Facebook video his expectations were “limited”. So far, the parties have been engaged in lower-level talks in Belarus, largely over humanitarian issues and involving only Ukrainian officials. • Leaders of the 27-nation EU are to meet in Versailles on Thursday and Friday. A draft declaration prepared for the summit said: “Russia’s war of aggression constitutes a tectonic shift in European history.” The leaders are expected to discuss reducing the bloc’s energy dependency on Russia, and Ukraine’s request to join the EU. • Russia’s foreign ministry has confirmed the use of the TOS-1A weapon system in Ukraine, Britain said. The UK’s ministry of defence said the system uses thermobaric rockets, creating incendiary and blast effects. Here is an explainer on thermobaric weapons. • The United States has seen indications that Russia is dropping “dumb bombs” – unguided munitions with no precise target – on Ukraine, a senior US defence official said. Officials added that the US was observing “increasing damage to civilian infrastructure and civilian casualties”. • Ukraine has accused Russian forces of “holding 400,000 people hostage” in Mariupol. The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said the city, where conditions are described as “apocalyptic”, was still being shelled by Russian troops despite an agreement to establish a safe evacuation corridor for civilians. • Ukrainian authorities have said the power supply has been cut to the defunct Chernobyl power plant. The UN’s atomic watchdog said the spent nuclear fuel stored there had cooled down sufficiently for it not to be an imminent concern. Still, the news is raising concerns that a lack of external power to the site could compromise nuclear safety. • More than 40,000 civilians were evacuated from across Ukraine on Wednesday but authorities struggled to get people away from conflict zones around the cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv and Mariupol, a Ukrainian negotiator said. Ukrainian authorities said earlier that the corridors should allow residents of the heavily bombed cities of Mariupol, Enerhodar, Sumy, Izyum and Volnovakha, as well as towns around Kyiv including Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel, to leave, calling on Russian forces to respect an “official public commitment” to cease fire.
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HEADLINE	03/10 Oil, gas companies face a potential bonanza
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/10/oil-and-gas-companies-are-looking-at-a-bonanza-from-the-ukraine-war
GIST	<p>Oil and gas companies are facing a potential bonanza from the Ukraine war, though few in the industry want to admit it, and many are using soaring prices and the fear of fuel shortages to cement their position with governments in ways that could have disastrous impacts on the climate crisis.</p> <p>“There is a huge opportunity for oil and gas companies, though I’m sure it is not one they would have chosen,” said Robert Buckley, head of relationship development at Cornwall Insight, an energy analysis company. “They have the opportunity to reposition themselves [as crucial to policymakers]. There is going to be a very high price for oil for a very long time, and even the prospect of physical shortages.”</p> <p>Oil prices have leapt dramatically, to more than \$130 a barrel, sending petrol prices in the UK to more than 155p a litre, while gas prices have also surged.</p> <p>Luke Sussams, of Jefferies investment bank, said: “The high-price environment is likely to last a long time. Boris Johnson has said that alongside the accelerated deployment of renewables will be greater production from the North Sea. There is the potential for growth prospects and upside [for fossil fuel producers].”</p> <p>The EU, the UK and the US have all announced drastic restrictions on imports of oil and gas from Russia, which will affect the EU most as about 40% of EU gas comes from Russia, but will hurt all countries as</p>

prices are set internationally. Those governments are now [urgently seeking ways to protect their energy security](#), through ramping up renewables and seeking alternative sources of oil and gas supply.

Opec, and Saudi Arabia in particular, are the obvious ports of call, but have been so far been reluctant to commit to increased production. This could change, as the FT reported that the United Arab Emirates' ambassador to the US favoured an increase, news which sent oil prices down about 11% from their peak.

But the crisis gives western oil and gas companies such as BP, Shell, Exxon and Total leverage among governments. In the UK, prime minister Boris Johnson defended oil companies against calls for a windfall tax on Wednesday from Labour. He said: "The net result of that would be to simply see the oil companies put their prices up yet higher and make it more difficult for them to do what we need them to do ... divesting from dependence on Russian oil and gas."

Robin Baillie, partner in the energy group at the international law firm Crowell and Moring, said: "Governments around the world are looking for [short-term solutions to finding an alternative to Russian energy](#), and the North Sea is an obvious one for the UK, until such time as more renewables come online."

New oil and gas fields take years and even decades to come into production, so even if companies begin to expand their exploration immediately it will not reduce current prices. Big oil and gas companies are now [awash with cash](#), which they could use to invest in pumping more from existing fields, and exploring new fields.

Green campaigners warned that oil and gas companies were using the Ukraine emergency to further their own interests, by encouraging governments to prioritise oil and gas production and make decisions now on investments that would have little impact on the current crisis but would vastly increase fossil fuel use for years to come.

Marc van Baal, of Follow This, a group of 8,000 green shareholders in oil and gas companies, said: "The leaders of oil and gas companies really have shown in the last years that they want to [hold on to their old business model](#). This is what they understand – turning hydrocarbons into petro-dollars. So I am afraid this is what they are telling governments they should do."

Tessa Khan, director of Uplift, which campaigns to end North Sea fossil fuels, said: "It's shameful that oil and gas companies, some of whom have profited from their Russian partnerships for years, now seek to use this humanitarian crisis to further their interests. The fact that they are still being listened to by governments, the UK's included, is beyond belief."

A stark reminder of the likely consequences of further dependence on oil and gas came from the International [Energy](#) Agency, which reported on Tuesday that greenhouse gas emissions had shown the highest ever annual increase in 2021. The global energy watchdog found that energy-related carbon dioxide emissions, which make up the bulk of greenhouse gases, had risen by 6% in 2021 to 36.3bn tonnes, their highest-ever level, as the global economy rebounded from the Covid-19 pandemic, relying heavily on coal to power the growth. The increase in global CO₂ emissions was more than 2bn tonnes, the largest in history in absolute terms, outweighing the decline in emissions seen during the lockdowns of 2020.

Renewable energy and energy efficiency offer alternatives to oil and gas, which the UK, the EU and the US are also pursuing. But if fossil fuel companies make decisions now to expand exploration and production, that will continue to result in high emissions for years and decades to come.

Lori Lodes, executive director of Climate Power, a campaigning group in the US, said: "More drilling in more places isn't a short-term fix, it's a long-term problem that only makes oil and gas CEOs richer and locks us into more dependence on dirty, unreliable, expensive and volatile fossil fuels."

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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/world/europe/russia-ukraine-economy.html
GIST	<p>As Russia's invasion of Ukraine grinds on, Moscow is finding itself mired in a parallel conflict: a contest of economic and political endurance against the West.</p> <p>Vladimir V. Putin, Russia's president, had prepared Russia for sanctions like those imposed after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, as if daring Western countries to cut off their citizens from Russian trade and see who blinked first.</p> <p>But the severity of Western measures has far exceeded expectations, not only devastating Russia's economy but also isolating its citizens from travel and even from Western brands like Apple and McDonald's.</p> <p>Now, both sides face a test of their ability to maintain domestic support for a standoff whose costs will be borne by regular citizens. More than a battle of wills, it is a test of two opposing systems.</p> <p>Mr. Putin's Russia, which rallied around nationalist fervor in 2014, now relies on propaganda and repression. Western leaders increasingly appeal to liberal ideals of international norms and collective welfare that had been in global decline — until now, they hope.</p> <p>The economic balance favors the West in the extreme. One study estimated that a full trade war would curb the combined gross domestic product of Western countries by 0.17 percent, but Russia's by a devastating 9.7 percent.</p> <p>Public opinion may also advantage the West, where surveys find wide support for harsh measures against Russia, whereas Mr. Putin dare not even acknowledge the war's extent for fear of triggering more protests.</p> <p>Still, Western leaders must maintain unity across 20-plus fractious democracies, persuading citizens from Canada to Bulgaria that spiking energy prices — which may be just the start of the economic shocks — are worth the sacrifice.</p> <p>Political fissures will inevitably open within the West, said Jeremy Shapiro, the research director for the European Council on Foreign Relations.</p> <p>"The polls really tell us nothing about how people will actually react to economic pain and masses of refugees," Mr. Shapiro said. The question is when.</p> <p>Mr. Putin, meanwhile, must maintain his grip on both Russia's public and the network of political power brokers who back him. If their tolerance of the war's rapidly rising toll slips before Western resolve does, it could imperil not just his war, but his very hold on power.</p> <p>The question of who breaks first may shape Ukraine's fate as much as any weapons transfer or tank assault. And though the outcome is impossible to predict, a range of economic indicators and political signals offer some clues.</p> <p>The West's Challenge</p> <p>Western countries' secret weapon, nearly as important as their economic edge, may be their citizens' sudden desire for concerted and unified action.</p> <p>In polls, Europeans across the continent express a moral imperative to punish Russia's invasion, as well as a belief that Russia now poses a direct threat to their countries.</p> <p>In a seven-country survey taken just before the invasion, a plurality said they were willing to personally bear the economic toll of isolating Russia, which provides much of Europe's energy. Country-specific polls suggest that share has likely increased.</p>

In Germany — the European Union's largest economy and often its decider on Russia matters — only [38 percent](#) supported increasing military spending as of September, now it is up to [69 percent](#).

In past standoffs, European leaders often went against the will of their voters to confront Moscow, seeing it as a grim necessity.

Now, leaders like Olaf Scholz of Germany and Emmanuel Macron of France are seeing their [approval ratings surge](#) as they rally against Russia. Far from playing down the costs to everyday citizens, some emphasize it as a point of pride.

Political risks are further eased by the election calendar: Mr. Macron is nearly alone among Western leaders in facing re-election this year and is a strong favorite to win.

Still, President Biden is under countervailing pressure from Republicans and voters alike to simultaneously stand up to Russia while keeping down gas prices. If politics around the crisis shift, Mr. Biden may feel compelled to adjust, especially as the November midterm elections, already expected to be difficult for his party, near.

And a slowdown in Russian energy exports — already underway as Russian firms are [buffeted by the turmoil](#) — is expected to hit Europe hard. Germany imports [more than half](#) of its gas from Russia, as does Austria. Some Eastern European countries run on nearly 100 percent Russian gas.

Europe's West gets most of its gas elsewhere, such as from Norway and Algeria. Still, as Russia is cut off from buyers, fossil fuels will become scarcer and therefore costlier worldwide. Some Germans' energy bills are [already projected](#) to increase by two-thirds this year.

To ease the burden, European governments are putting in place [sweeping energy subsidies](#), worth 15.5 billion euros, or about \$17 billion, in France, €5.5 billion in Italy, €2 billion in Poland, €1.7 billion in Austria, and so on. Many target low-income households.

But [there may be a timer](#) on Western resilience. Unless European countries radically re-engineer their infrastructure for importing gas or take on perhaps the fastest shift to renewable energy in history — both considered technically feasible but costly — they could potentially run out of fuel next winter.

Economic shocks could extend well beyond heating costs. A number of European industries are already [slowing production](#) because of rising energy prices. Russia also exports much of the world's copper and other industrial materials.

At the same time, while Europeans express wide support for welcoming Ukrainian refugees, it is unclear whether this will last.

Europe is already expecting a major surge in refugee arrivals this summer, many from Afghanistan. Western leaders have proved extremely sensitive to anti-immigration backlash.

"There remain significant divides that are being buried in the emotion of the moment," Mr. Shapiro said. The West's greatest ally in maintaining unity may be Mr. Putin himself. By massing forces on NATO's borders and producing shocking images of destruction in Ukraine, he has given Europeans something to rally against, distracting from their disagreements, for now.

Moscow's Challenge

In a telling contrast to 2014, when many Russians cheered their country's invasion of Ukraine, Mr. Putin has turned almost immediately to repression and censorship, threatening severe prison terms for so much as calling the invasion a "war."

This has accelerated a kind of authoritarian feedback loop in Russia, with tightening repression feeding popular discontent, beyond even the extremes of recent years.

But Mr. Putin belongs to a particular club of authoritarians — individual strongmen, rather than military or party dictatorships — for whom popular support is a secondary concern.

Rather, such leaders draw their power from the backing of political elites, like the heads of security agencies or state industries, said Erica Frantz, a Michigan State University scholar of authoritarianism.

“This is not to say that ordinary citizens don’t matter, but rather that if we’re looking for regime vulnerabilities at the moment, the focal point really needs to be on these indicators of elite discontent,” Dr. Frantz said.

Authoritarian elites, garrisoned behind vast personal wealth, can more easily endure the economic hardship that will be borne by regular Russians. They also tend to give leaders wide latitude in wartime, which may be why strongmen rarely lose power because of battlefield losses, [research has shown](#).

Still, such elites are not fooled by state propaganda. And they are not indifferent to their country’s fate.

[Surveys of Russian political elites](#) conducted in 2020 found that most backed Mr. Putin for exactly the accomplishments now under threat: stabilizing the country and winning it respect abroad. Many also expressed concern over his handling of the economy — and opposition to military adventurism in Ukraine.

“The crisis will be most severe for a minimum of three years. Take the 1998 crisis and multiply it by three,” Oleg Deripaska, a prominent Russian billionaire, said in an unusual break with the Kremlin, referring to Russia’s economically catastrophic 1990s.

Sanctions could hurt Mr. Putin with the elite by limiting his ability to distribute the spoils they expect in return for their support. So could popular unrest, if it grows severe enough to make those elites question whether Mr. Putin is imperiling Russia’s stability.

“Russian public opinion is becoming such a problem that Putin is effectively fighting two wars: one in Ukraine, and one at home,” Sam Greene, a Russia scholar at King’s College London, [wrote this week](#).

The danger is not only antiwar protests, which have been mostly associated with segments of society already skeptical of Mr. Putin. Bank runs or other forms of mass economic panic, Mr. Greene argued, could trigger a sense of national crisis, [overriding](#) even the sanguine lies of state media.

Mr. Putin, by hiding the scale and nature of the invasion, is in effect tying his own hands, making it impossible for his government to adequately inform citizens about the struggles ahead. You can’t ask citizens to rally around a war you insist does not exist.

Much as European disunity is all but inevitable as the tolls mount, apprehension among the Russian elite may simply be a matter of time.

“The indicators of elite discontent that we have seen thus far are unusual in Putin’s Russia and should therefore be taken seriously,” Dr. Frantz said, referring to comments by Mr. Deripaska and a few others. Though she stressed that Mr. Putin could well ride out the self-made crisis, “in the long term, this external pressure — coupled with the domestic unrest — could lead to Putin’s downfall.”

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HEADLINE	03/09 Power cutoff to Chernobyl nuclear waste?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/climate/chernobyl-nuclear-waste-power-outage.html
GIST	Unlike an operating nuclear plant, which can use some of the electricity it generates to power its operation, the long-defunct Chernobyl plant in Ukraine is completely dependent on outside sources of electricity.

So when that power is cut, as Ukrainian officials and the International Atomic Energy Agency say it has been by Russian troops, problems can result.

As of Wednesday Chernobyl, the scene of the worst nuclear disaster in history when one of its four reactors exploded and burned 36 years ago, is operating mainly on power from diesel generators. A former longtime employee of the plant with knowledge of conditions there said that some equipment was functioning on battery power as well, and that firefighting systems, as well as radiation monitoring, had been affected.

The I.E.A.E. said Wednesday that it saw “no critical impact on safety” at the complex. But what could happen if all these backups failed and Chernobyl was left with no power at all?

The Chernobyl plant came online in the late 1970s, with the completion of its first two reactors. By 1983 the third and fourth units were operating, including the one that was destroyed three years later.

That accident, the result of an ill-advised and ill-executed test, killed more than two dozen people in its immediate aftermath, most from exposure to high levels of radiation. The burning reactor core produced a plume of radioactive particles that spread across parts of Europe, and many more people suffered long-term effects, including cancers, from exposure.

Contamination was worst in a large part of Ukraine and Belarus around the plant, which was declared an “exclusion zone” and remains largely off limits. Villages and a city were permanently abandoned.

The plant’s remaining three reactors were eventually shut down, the last in 2000. The nuclear fuel has been removed from all of them, and the turbines and other equipment that generated power have mostly been removed.

With no operating reactors at the plant, there is no risk of a core meltdown as there would be if an operating plant lost power and could no longer circulate water through the reactor. This is what happened at the Fukushima reactors in Japan in 2011, when an earthquake and tsunami wiped out backup power systems.

But Chernobyl carries some other risks related to the large amount of nuclear waste on site.

The fuel inside a reactor eventually becomes used up and is replaced. As is common practice in the nuclear power industry, the fuel removed from all four Chernobyl reactors over the years, more than 20,000 assemblies in all, is stored in pools of water that dissipate the heat produced as the fuel decays radioactively. When fuel is newly removed from a reactor and is still highly radioactive, there is a lot of decay and thus a lot of heat, so plants need power to run pumps that circulate the storage water, removing excess heat in the process.

If the water in storage tanks got so hot it boiled off, the fuel would be exposed to the air and could catch fire. That, too, was among the risks in the Fukushima disaster.

The I.A.E.A. has said that the used fuel assemblies at Chernobyl are old enough and have decayed enough that circulating pumps are not needed to keep them safe.

“The heat load of the spent fuel storage pool and the volume of cooling water contained in the pool is sufficient to maintain effective heat removal without the need for electrical supply,” the agency said.

Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, workers had started transferring some of these fuel assemblies to a long-term dry storage facility, which began operating in 2020. Fuel assemblies are ready for dry storage when they have cooled enough to be safely exposed to the air.

The other main source of nuclear waste, which is unique to Chernobyl, are the ruins of the destroyed reactor itself. An estimated 200 tons of fuel remain there, in a lava-like mix with molten concrete, sand and chemicals that were dumped on the reactor during the disaster.

This highly radioactive mixture is found throughout the remains of the reactor, having flowed through doorways and drain pipes and down stairwells and other parts of the structure before hardening. Some of these fuel-containing materials, as they are called, are in places that are completely inaccessible and have only been studied by boring into them.

In the chaotic, jumbled remains of the destroyed Chernobyl reactor, there is no cooling system for a loss of power to affect.

But in recent years there have been episodes in which nuclear reactions have started spontaneously in pockets of these fuel-containing materials, leading to spikes in radiation levels. They have been monitored and will have to be dealt with someday.

Without monitoring, of both humidity and radiation, workers would not know if any new episode was occurring. The former employee with knowledge of conditions at the plant said that ventilation systems that helped control humidity levels had stopped operating.

Since 2017, the destroyed reactor has been covered by a large arched structure, intended to confine the waste and safeguard against any release of radiation. The structure is also meant to allow the work of removing waste to long-term storage to begin, a process expected to take decades.

The facility was only granted an operating license by Ukraine's authorities last year, so the work had only just begun. There are several large cranes and other specialized equipment to allow crews to work safely. With no power supply, most, if not all of that work, could not proceed.

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HEADLINE	03/09 Fraught offer: Poland jets thru US hands
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/us/politics/poland-fighter-jets-ukraine-russia.html
GIST	<p>President Biden's commitment to keeping the United States from engaging in direct combat with Russian forces faced an unexpected test this week, when Poland surprised American officials by offering to turn over its collection of aging, Russian-made MIG fighters, for ultimate transfer to Ukraine.</p> <p>But the offer came with a hitch: Poland refused to give the MIGs directly to Ukraine. The deal would only go forward if the United States, and NATO, did the transferring, and then replaced Poland's fleet with American-made fighter jets. The United States, blindsided by the demand, began to pick apart what was going on. Polish leaders, fearful of incurring Russia's wrath, and perhaps an attack on the air base where the MIGs launched from, was handing the problem of becoming a "co-combatant" in the war off to Washington and its other NATO allies.</p> <p>The Pentagon all but rejected the idea on Tuesday night and said the United States had not been consulted. By late Wednesday, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III had put a stake through the whole idea, telling his Polish counterpart in a phone call that the proposed MIG transfer was a dead letter, Pentagon officials said.</p> <p>"The transfer of combat aircraft could be mistaken for an escalatory step," John F. Kirby, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters.</p> <p>In the midst of a remarkably unified alliance, the back and forth was a reminder that the joint effort to punish and ultimately repel Russia has a third rail that no one wants to touch. Ukraine's allies will provide 17,000 anti-tank weapons in six days; they will train their cyberweapons on Russian targets. But they will not risk a dogfight over the skies of Ukraine, which, in the minds of many, is bound to bring them fully into the war.</p>

That distinction was driven home on Wednesday, when Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, who had initially seemed somewhat open to the idea of Poland giving its planes to Ukraine, said the idea of flying MIG-29 fighter jets to a U.S. air base in Germany for transfer to Ukraine lacked a clear “substantive rationale.”

“The prospect of fighter jets at the disposal of the United States Government departing from a U.S. NATO base in Germany to fly into airspace contested with Russia over Ukraine raises some serious concerns for the entire NATO alliance,” Mr. Blinken said during a news conference in Washington.

Then he got to his central point: “Our goal is to end the war, not to expand it — including potentially expand it to NATO territory,” Mr. Blinken said.

Administration officials, when promised anonymity, conceded that the political pressure on them to strike a deal to put Ukrainian pilots in cockpits was huge. While Russia’s air force has performed poorly so far, Ukraine’s ability to contest the skies with its current fleet is limited — and probably diminishing, once Russia moves in its sophisticated air defenses.

So when the United States rejected the proposal, Republicans leapt — the first time there has been a partisan breach on strategy.

“President Biden should explain exactly why he vetoed fighter jets for Ukraine,” Senator Ben Sasse, Republican of Nebraska and a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said in a statement.

He argued that the administration was giving Ukraine “Javelins and Stingers from NATO territory,” a reference to antitank and antiaircraft weapons. “So why exactly does President Biden think that Ukrainian MIGs, flown by Ukrainian pilots, would be shot down over NATO territory while they’re on their way to defend Ukrainian airspace?”

There were similar blasts from other Republicans.

In fact, the line between sending ammunition and sending weapons is a murky one. And while there may be legal distinctions, administration officials made clear that they had no doubt that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia would regard sending the planes as an escalatory move.

The issue started about 10 days ago when Josep Borrell Fontelles, the European Union’s top foreign policy and security official, said at a news conference that the E.U. nations were going to provide “fighting jets. We’re not talking about just ammunition. We are providing more important arms to go to a war.”

He later backtracked, saying countries would individually decide what to do. The idea picked up traction in Congress. Many looked to Poland, as one of three nations that could provide the MIG fighters — which, by definition, are three decades old and hardly up to modern standards. (The Ukrainians want these planes because they know how to fly them — old MIGs, left over from Soviet days, make up their air force.)

But then Poland began to think about the Russian threats to attack any country that allowed Ukrainian jets to lift off from their airfields to engage Russian forces.

So Poland said it wanted to hand the planes over to the U.S. base at Ramstein, Germany, turning it into something of a used-plane lot for Cold War aircraft. It was up to the Americans, they said, to fix them up and give them to Ukraine.

American officials believe that the jets, given Russia’s increasing anti-air capabilities in Ukraine, would have limited value to Ukraine and that they are not worth the risks they could pose to more effective means of bolstering the Ukrainian military. The move could, for example, prompt Russia to intensify its efforts to stop supply convoys carrying arms from allied countries.

	<p>Daniel Fried, a former senior State Department official and former U.S. ambassador to Poland, said the snafu seemed to have started with a miscommunication and snowballed from there.</p> <p>“It feels like a mess. I suspect there is a chain of miscommunication that resulted in mixed signals to the Poles.”</p> <p>“Borrell started it,” he said. “Then the U.S. failed to be clear with Poles and inadvertently gave mixed signals,” a reference to Mr. Blinken’s initial, seeming openness to the idea.</p> <p>Mr. Fried concluded: “The administration needs not to explain why the MIGs are a bad idea. They need to explain what they will do to help the Ukrainians achieve what they wanted to achieve with the MIGs.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Russia cluster munitions, vacuum bombs
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/us/politics/cluster-munitions-vacuum-bombs-russia-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>During an emergency meeting of the United Nations General Assembly last Wednesday, called in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. ambassador made an allegation about the weapons being used in the war.</p> <p>“We have seen videos of Russian forces moving exceptionally lethal weaponry into Ukraine, which has no place on the battlefield,” Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said.</p> <p>“That includes cluster munitions and vacuum bombs — which are banned under the Geneva Convention,” she added.</p> <p>The same day, on CNN, David H. Petraeus, a retired general and former commander of U.S. Central Command, denounced Russia’s use of “missiles, rockets, artillery, cluster bombs, even these horrific thermobaric weapons that suck the oxygen out of an area and out of lungs.”</p> <p>Ukraine’s ambassador to the United States, Oksana Markarova, made a similar comment the night before. “They used the vacuum bomb today,” she said, according to Reuters. “The devastation that Russia is trying to inflict on Ukraine is large.”</p> <p>Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, with its constant stream of videos and photos showing devastating attacks, has reinvigorated discussions about whether certain weapons are too cruel or too indiscriminate for use in warfare.</p> <p>Pentagon officials have said they are aware of reports and allegations that Russia is using cluster munitions and thermobaric weapons — which some call vacuum bombs — in Ukraine, but have been unable to confirm them. Last week, the NATO secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, confirmed that Russia had indeed used cluster bombs.</p> <p>But in calling out Russia’s actions, some officials and commentators have repeated inaccurate descriptions of some of the weapons. For example, neither cluster munitions nor thermobaric weapons are addressed in the Geneva Conventions, a series of international agreements that govern warfare.</p> <p>Cluster munitions are a class of weapon comprising rockets, bombs, missiles, mortar and artillery shells that split open midair and dispense smaller weapons or bomblets over a wide area. Humanitarian groups focused on demining have noted that 20 percent or more of the anti-personnel versions of those bomblets fail to detonate on impact, yet they can explode if later picked up or handled.</p> <p>The Convention on Cluster Munitions, which took effect in 2010, bans their use because of the harm they pose to noncombatants. More than 100 nations have signed the treaty, but the United States, Ukraine and Russia have not.</p>

The weapon that Ms. Markarova referred to as a “vacuum bomb” is obscure by comparison, rarely used by modern militaries and not banned by treaties.

The warheads in most conventional bombs and rockets are designed to kill primarily by producing large amounts of lethal metal fragments when they explode. But a “vacuum bomb” — generally called a fuel-air explosive — releases an explosive slurry into the air that spreads and mixes with oxygen before exploding.

Fuel-air weapons have been used to clear minefields and landing zones of thick vegetation. But videos taken in Ukraine show that the Russian army has used them as part of an artillery weapon, a rocket system called the TOS-1A.

The Russian army’s own characterization of the TOS-1A has only added to public confusion about its nature. Russia variably refers to it as a heavy flamethrower and as a thermobaric weapon — the latter being a term the U.S. military uses to describe the kinds of munitions that have largely replaced fuel-air explosives. The new weapons have solid explosive mixtures that can produce similarly large and longer duration blast waves.

The Pentagon has used thermobaric explosives in airdropped bombs to destroy cave complexes in Afghanistan as well as in specialized hand grenades and shoulder-fired rockets meant to destroy buildings.

The term “vacuum bomb,” which refers to the weapon’s use of atmospheric oxygen and the large pressure wave it produces, is sometimes misconstrued to have an even darker meaning. Public misunderstanding about these weapons harks back to [a 1975 incident](#) in which South Vietnamese pilots were accused of using fuel-air explosive weapons during one of the final battles of the Vietnam War at Xuan Loc. That may have been the genesis of the myth that persists today — that the explosions kill people by sucking the air out of their lungs.

When asked about reports that an American-made bomb may have suffocated hundreds of victims at Xuan Loc, a Pentagon spokesman, [Maj. Gen. Winant Sidle](#), speculated that a specific fuel-air explosive weapon might be able to consume all of the air within 20 yards of where it detonated. But if that had occurred as the general offered, atmospheric air would have quickly filled the resulting vacuum.

It is possible, however, that survivors and rescuers encountered a horrifying scene at Xuan Loc: corpses with no visible external injuries. Because fuel-air explosives produce a massive blast but relatively little attendant shrapnel, some of the dead probably would have suffered solely internal injuries.

The lungs of those victims would not have been devoid of air, but rather filled with blood after air sacs known as alveoli ruptured. The pressure could also have crushed their internal organs, which would not necessarily have left behind an obviously mangled corpse.

During the Vietnam War, activists seized on certain weapons like napalm, fuel-air explosives and cluster weapons as a way to protest the conflict in general, though their concerns did not result in any long-term changes by the Pentagon. U.S. troops used all three of those weapons in Desert Storm in 1991 and again in Afghanistan in 2001.

In 2008, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates pledged that the Pentagon would eliminate its use of older failure-prone cluster weapons by Jan. 1, 2019. In the intervening decade, use of these weapons required approval from one of the four-star generals and admirals called combatant commanders.

In 2009, one of those commanders, General Petraeus, oversaw the last known use of cluster weapons by American forces in combat.

In late December of that year, two ships from the U.S.S. Nimitz Strike Group operating in the Northern Arabian Sea [launched Tomahawk cruise missiles](#) loaded with clusters of bomblets at a suspected Al Qaeda camp in Yemen.

Navy documents released to The New York Times show that two of the Nimitz's escort ships engaged targets in Yemen — destroyer U.S.S. Pinckney, which launched seven Tomahawks on Dec. 24, and the cruiser U.S.S. Chosin, which launched another seven Tomahawks on Dec. 29.

In November 2017, just over a year before the U.S. military's self-imposed ban on cluster munitions was to go into effect, Pentagon leadership [reversed Mr. Gates's policy](#), citing possible war with North Korea as a reason to keep the weapons available for use.

The [official transcript](#) of Ms. Thomas-Greenfield's remarks to the U.N. General Assembly last week now contains a footnote, following questions from The Times, to reflect that the United States, Ukraine and Russia are not parties to the treaty on cluster munitions. The specific use of cluster weapons and so-called vacuum bombs "directed against civilians" is banned under the Geneva Conventions, the footnote clarifies. The language in her speech about exceptionally lethal weaponry having "no place on the battlefield" has been crossed out.

Last week, in response to a question from The Times, John F. Kirby, a Pentagon spokesman, said that the Defense Department's cluster munitions policy was under review.

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HEADLINE	03/09 California gas prices especially high
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/us/california-high-gas-prices.html
GIST	<p>The price of gasoline in the United States reached a new high on Tuesday at \$4.173 per gallon, surpassing the previous high set in July 2008.</p> <p>But, as you probably know, fuel costs in California have been climbing for weeks and are significantly above the national average. On Tuesday, the average cost of a gallon in the Golden State was \$5.444, the highest in the nation, according to AAA.</p> <p>So why do we pay so much at the pump?</p> <p>Gas prices have been rising for months nationally because of soaring demand following Covid-19 shutdowns. Costs began to climb even more once Russia invaded Ukraine, and will most likely keep growing after President Biden's decision on Tuesday to ban Russian oil imports.</p> <p>California is the only state where a gallon costs more than \$5. In Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo, Napa and many other parts of the state, the average price of regular unleaded now exceeds \$5.50.</p> <p>"It's hitting my pocket big time," Boualem Dehmas said this week as he filled up at a Chevron station in San Francisco, where regular gas cost \$5.69.</p> <p>Dehmas, 52, is a self-employed limo driver supporting a wife and three children. How is he managing to survive the price increases? "God only knows," he said.</p> <p>California's high fuel prices are partly because of taxes as well as regulatory programs aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Together, they added about \$1.27 to the cost of a gallon of gas last month, according to a calculation by the Western States Petroleum Association.</p> <p>About 40 percent of that cost comes from the state's gasoline tax. California taxes fuel at 51.1 cents per gallon, the second-highest amount in the nation after Pennsylvania, according to the Federation of Tax Administrators.</p> <p>A planned increase to that tax is set to take effect in July to keep up with inflation. Gov. Gavin Newsom has proposed halting the spike, but Democratic leaders have been reluctant to agree.</p>

In his State of the State address on Tuesday, Newsom also [proposed a tax rebate](#) to address rising gas prices. He said he was working with lawmakers on the plan “to put money back in the pockets of Californians.”

Kevin Slagle, a spokesman with the petroleum association, based in Sacramento, said gas prices also tended to be higher here because the state was a “fuel island.”

California produces enough gasoline to meet 30 percent of its needs, and the rest is imported from Alaska or other countries, he said. There are no interstate pipelines carrying gasoline into the state.

That means that all imports must come by ship or truck, both of which are more costly. (If you’re wondering, California’s biggest foreign importers of crude oil are Ecuador, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, according to the [California Energy Commission](#).)

In the Bay Area, one of the most expensive housing markets in the country, many lower-wage workers who commute long distances from more affordable areas are feeling the pinch.

Manuel Garcia drives 92 miles every day from Sacramento to San Francisco for his job at a construction company. The price of filling up his truck has increased to \$140 from \$80.

“If my company didn’t pay for my gas, I’d look somewhere else for work,” Garcia, 62, told The New York Times.

Though the current prices are definitely high, they aren’t breaking records if you take into account inflation, [writes Michael Hiltzik](#), a Los Angeles Times columnist.

In 2008, the last major run-up in gas prices, the cost of a gallon in California reached \$4.588. If you translate that into today’s dollars, it would be \$5.83, far higher than the current price at the pump.

Still, gas prices have an outsize impact on people’s perceptions of the economy, [my colleagues reported](#). Fuel might account for only a small share of consumers’ overall spending, but the giant numbers posted alongside every highway in America hold plenty of sway.

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HEADLINE	03/09 US security guarantees around the world
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/9/europe-asia-south-america-us-security-guarantees-s/
GIST	<p>President Biden has repeatedly made it clear that he won’t send U.S. troops to defend Ukraine from invading Russian forces, and the White House is reluctant to implement more limited measures such as a no-fly zone out of fear of sparking a catastrophic world war.</p> <p>Washington may be obligated to respond much differently in dozens of other theoretical instances in Asia, Europe, and South America.</p> <p>U.S. troops could be thrust into a combat zone in virtually any corner of the world under a collection of mutual defense and security agreements forged over the past 75 years. Those agreements are drawing renewed attention during Russia’s war in Ukraine and the rise of China as a major military peer. Beijing is looking to expand its power and influence across the Pacific, which could lead to a confrontation with the U.S.</p> <p>A growing anti-interventionist streak within the Republican Party has sparked a deeper look at how thin the U.S. military has spread itself with apparent promises to act in the event of attacks on other nations around the planet.</p> <p>The exact number is difficult to pin down, but some foreign policy specialists say the U.S. has security commitments in one form or another with at least 140 countries. They include staunch allies in the Pacific such as Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea, though the U.S. has a policy of</p>

“strategic ambiguity” for direct military intervention on behalf of Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack.

The clearest, best-known example is a commitment under Article 5 of the NATO charter, which considers an attack on one member to be an attack on all. Although the charter doesn’t explicitly require the U.S. to immediately go to war, Secretary of State Antony Blinken made clear Tuesday that the U.S. will join the fight if Russian troops invade Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia or any other Eastern European NATO member.

“We will defend every inch of NATO territory with the full force of our collective power,” Mr. Blinken said at the conclusion of a visit to the Baltic states.

Some call that hubristic overstretch, but many analysts say clarity is the right course when dealing with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“Generally speaking ... we tend toward being too timid for fear of provoking the aggressor,” said Bradley Bowman, senior director of the Center on Military and Political Power at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

“If you’re too vague, in some cases, you can invite the very thing you don’t want to invite,” he said.

Global commitments

The U.S. also has seemingly strong commitments closer to home. Under the 1947 Rio Treaty, signed in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the U.S. vowed to “assist in meeting the attack” on any of the other 21 signatories. That includes Venezuela, which has had a deeply hostile relationship with Washington for years under longtime strongman Hugo Chavez and current socialist President Nicolas Maduro. Both Venezuelan leaders cultivated ties with other U.S. adversaries such as Iran and, ironically, Russia.

Along with Article 5, the Rio Treaty, the Southeast Asia Treaty and other commitments, the State Department lists on its website at least 55 nations with which the U.S. has a formal collective defense agreement. In reality, the number is much higher.

In a detailed 2016 analysis, researchers with the Rand Corp. said that “altogether, the United States has significant security commitments to approximately 140 nations, roughly half of which are highly formalized through treaty obligations.”

“Most nations in the contemporary international system can therefore be said to possess a security commitment, in one form or another, from the United States,” they wrote.

Indeed, many nations without a formal commitment have the implicit guarantee of military assistance from the U.S. in the event of a major attack. Israel does not have a formal defense treaty with the U.S., but the close military alliance has served as a deterrent for would-be aggressors such as Iran.

Multiple nations across the Middle East — Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and others — host U.S. military personnel. The presence of American assets provides some level of collective security, even if the U.S. has never signed a formal defense treaty.

In the geopolitical reality of the 21st century, it’s difficult to know whether and to what degree the U.S. would act militarily to aid an ally in South America, Asia or elsewhere. Although the Biden administration says it is willing to go to war if Russia invades NATO territory, there are questions about the circumstances in which the U.S. is willing to risk worldwide conflict and nuclear exchanges to repel a Russian border incursion in, say, Estonia.

Some specialists say it's difficult to know exactly how the U.S. would respond until a specific wartime situation and its potential consequences come into focus.

"We are committed by treaty to protecting a large swath of the world's nations: most of Latin America through the Rio Treaty, NATO states, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand. We informally committed to various other countries, starting with Israel and maybe including Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, UAE and more," said Benjamin Friedman, policy director at Defense Priorities, a Washington-based think tank that advocates a more restrained U.S. military role abroad.

"How much of this is really serious is anyone's guess. The Rio Treaty doesn't seem to mean much anymore. Because there has been such long-lasting peace among big powers and U.S. deterrence capability is so profound, its limits are never really tested," he told The Washington Times. "The war in Ukraine doesn't show that we wouldn't defend all our treaty allies, but it is a reminder that it's always been a bit doubtful that, when push comes to shove, we'd risk nuclear war for allies like Estonia or Montenegro. Even in the Cold War, there was always that nagging question of whether we'd trade New York for Berlin. We spent a great deal trying to escape that question and never did."

'The beginning of World War III'

Indeed, each U.S. commitment contains significant wiggle room. Even the oft-cited Article 5 states that NATO members will assist in the event of an attack through "action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force." The 1951 security agreement with Australia and New Zealand states that each signatory would "act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes."

Other agreements contain similar language. Even if the Rio Treaty is invoked, it's not clear that an American administration would interpret the phrase "assist in meeting the attack" to mean the involvement of U.S. troops, ships and fighter jets.

Nowhere is that ambiguity more evident than Taiwan. President Biden has continued a long-standing policy of leaving open the question of how the U.S. would respond to an attack on the island, which China considers to be a breakaway province.

Mr. Biden made waves last year when he told an interviewer that the U.S. would, in fact, use its military to defend Taiwan from the Chinese. The White House quickly contradicted Mr. Biden's words and said American policy remains the same: to provide military assistance to Taiwan but offer no clear-cut answer on whether U.S. troops would enter the fight.

That policy has frustrated those in the foreign policy establishment who have clamored for a more concrete commitment. Some specialists, however, say ambiguity has worked.

"Even though the Taiwan situation looks like this stupid compromise that doesn't make a lot of logical sense, it's actually stood the test of time," said Michael Beckley, an author and international relations professor at Tufts University who writes extensively on U.S. security commitments. "It's kept peace in the Taiwan Strait, which is not a foregone conclusion by any stretch. It walks that fine line."

The crisis playing out in Ukraine and any potential Chinese move on Taiwan are much different, but they have one fundamental similarity: a fear that any direct U.S. military involvement could quickly spiral out of control and lead to a major world war that perhaps includes the use of nuclear weapons and millions of civilian casualties.

Those fears are on full display in Washington, where even some traditionally hawkish lawmakers warn that instituting a no-fly zone in the skies over Ukraine would carry significant ramifications.

"I think people need to understand what a no-fly zone means. ... It's not some rule you pass that everybody has to oblige by," Sen. Marco Rubio, Florida Republican, told ABC's "This Week" program on Sunday.

	“It’s the willingness to shoot down the aircrafts of the Russian Federation, which is basically the beginning of World War III,” he said.
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HEADLINE	03/09 New danger China attack on Taiwan?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/9/russian-invasion-raises-new-danger-chinese-attack-/
GIST	<p>The danger of China conducting a major military attack on Taiwan has increased in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, senior military and defense officials told Congress on Wednesday.</p> <p>The danger, based on China’s growing military power, is greater than at any time in recent years, Ely Ratner, assistant defense secretary for Indo-Pacific security affairs, told the House Armed Services Committee.</p> <p>“I think there is a mounting threat of aggression from the PRC,” said Mr. Ratner, as U.S. officials assess Chinese President Xi Jinping is conducting a major buildup of military forces to prepare for an attack on Taiwan, which he has vowed to reclaim for the mainland.</p> <p>“His capabilities are growing and his patience seems to be decreasing,” Mr. Ratner said.</p> <p>The Pentagon is already working with Taiwan on one lesson from Ukraine — the need to develop stronger defense capabilities and the need for closer coordination with states in the region.</p> <p>International unity in response to the Ukraine crisis is “an important signal to a potential aggressor in the Pacific,” Mr. Ratner said.</p> <p>And while the threat of a Chinese invasion has increased since Russia’s Feb. 24 invasion, punishing economic sanctions that have been imposed on the Kremlin for its aggression also could help deter China from attacking Taiwan, he added.</p> <p>Adm. John Aquilino, commander of the Indo-Pacific Command, said the Russian invasion was “a real wake-up [call]” for the United States and Europe.</p> <p>“No. 1, we have to look at this and say ‘Hey, this could happen,’” he said. “And I have a sense of urgency to execute the mission, as the secretary [of defense] has assigned, which is to prevent this conflict.”</p> <p>To deter a Chinese attack, the Pentagon is building up forces and moving them closer to China, he said. A stronger U.S. military posture and greater efforts to assist Taiwan’s defenses are two key elements of the strategy.</p> <p>Taiwan also is bolstering its reserve forces outside the uniformed armed services, forces that can provide fighting capabilities similar to the volunteers effectively battling Russians in Ukraine, he noted.</p> <p>“I can’t tell you at this point what the PRC has learned from watching the European issue,” Adm. Aquilino said, using the acronym of People’s Republic of China.”</p> <p>“What I would say is I think I’m seeing the right lessons that we’d like to learn,” he said. “No. 1, the investment of blood in order to prosecute this illegal event. Second, the international condemnation and the unwillingness to accept it. And third, the drastic economic impacts to the people. Those are the right lessons should this switch over to the Indo-Pacific region.”</p> <p>House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith said recent belligerent statements about Taiwan from the Chinese government are “very, very dangerous.”</p>

“We could easily see a China-Taiwan situation in the same way we now see Russia-Ukraine situation,” the Washington state Democrat said.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said earlier this week that efforts by the United States to promote Taiwan’s independence will “push Taiwan to a dangerous situation” and “bring unbearable consequences to the U.S. side.”

Adm. Aquilino said China is “increasing its aggression” toward Taiwan and other states, citing a recent border clash with India, a security crackdown in Hong Kong and the jailing of 1 million mostly Muslim residents of Xinjiang in western China.

Taiwan also has recognized the need to bolster its defenses and recently purchased 100 U.S. Harpoon anti-ship missiles that may not be delivered until 2025.

“The focus there is we need to get them there quickly,” Adm. Aquilino said.

Asked about delays in getting weaponry to Taiwan to deter China, Mr. Ratner said, “We’re currently in the process of evaluating all tools and authorities possible to expedite the provision of the necessary asymmetric capabilities to Taiwan, precisely to reinforce the kind of deterrent you are talking about.”

In his prepared statement for the hearing, Adm. Aquilino said eventually retaking Taiwan remains a high priority for Beijing: “PLA forces have long exercised in areas around Taiwan, but the scale and sophistication of this training has drastically increased,” he stated.

But the admiral appeared to back off a warning made in a congressional hearing a year ago that China could be ready to move against Taiwan in less than six years. His predecessor at the Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. Philip Davidson, had said China could strike Taiwan by 2027.

Chinese military forces in 2021 stepped up coercive activities, including flights into Taiwan’s air defense zone and amphibious assault training near the island.

“While the PRC claims to still prefer a peaceful resolution of cross-strait differences, it has never relinquished use of force as an option,” the admiral said.

China also is continuing an alarming military build-up that includes advanced weapons and capabilities for land, sea, air, space and cyberspace warfare.

“The [People’s Liberation Army] is developing capabilities to project power outside of the PRC’s immediate periphery,” he said. “Xi Jinping has publicly directed the PLA to complete most elements of military modernization by 2027, and they continue to execute the most extensive military build-up since World War II.”

China’s navy is currently the world’s largest with around 350 warships and submarines, including 130 major surface combat vessels. Beijing plans to have a fleet of 420 warships in the next three years.

China also recently deployed a new J-20 fighter that will add to the power of what the admiral called the largest aviation force in the Indo-Pacific region.

“In addition to an extensive arsenal of advanced ballistic missiles, the PLA Rocket Force is pursuing land-attack, supersonic cruise missiles and other advanced weapons,” he said.

Russia also has increased military operations in the Pacific as a result of the Ukraine conflict.

Before the Feb. 24 operation began, Russian forces in the Far East “pushed out 20 ships and submarines as we can count, they placed them in defensive positions,” Adm. Aquilino said. “They postured other forces

	to be able to defend their eastern flank. So we absolutely have seen a change and we continue to monitor those like we do every day.”
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HEADLINE	03/09 Subtle shifts raise hopes for cease-fire
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/world/europe/ukraine-russia-cessate-fire-talks.html
GIST	<p>ISTANBUL — When President Vladimir V. Putin launched his invasion two weeks ago, he said a primary goal was the “denazification” of Ukraine. He referred to the Ukrainian government as a “gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis,” making it clear that his aim was to topple it.</p> <p>But in recent days, the language has shifted, with the Kremlin signaling that Mr. Putin is no longer bent on regime change in Kyiv. It is a subtle shift, and it may be a head-fake; but it is prompting officials who have scrambled to mediate to believe that Mr. Putin may be seeking a negotiated way out of a war that has become a much bloodier slog than he expected.</p> <p>On Thursday, Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov of Russia is expected to meet his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, in Turkey, in the highest-level talks between the two countries since the war began on Feb. 24. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, whose top diplomat has held a total of 10 calls with Mr. Lavrov and Mr. Kuleba since the start of the war, said on Wednesday that the meeting could “crack the door open to a permanent cease-fire.”</p> <p>Leading up to the meeting, both sides have softened their public positions, though they remain far apart. Russia has narrowed its demands to focus on Ukrainian “neutrality” and the status of its Russian-occupied regions, and declared on Wednesday that Russia was not seeking to “overthrow” Ukraine’s government. President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine on Tuesday suggested he was open to revising Ukraine’s constitutionally enshrined aspiration to join NATO, and even to a compromise over the status of Ukrainian territory now controlled by Russia.</p> <p>“The changes are noticeable,” Ivan Timofeev, the director of programs at the government-funded Russian International Affairs Council, said of the evolution in Russia’s negotiating position. “This position has become more realistic.”</p> <p>The Kremlin’s position now, according to comments this week by its spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, is that Ukraine must recognize Russian sovereignty over Crimea and the independence of the Russian-backed, separatist “people’s republics” in the country’s east and enshrine a status of neutrality in its constitution. That is still far from what Mr. Zelensky has said he would be willing to accept — and it could also puncture Mr. Putin’s strongman image at home, opening him up to criticism that he waged an enormous war for limited gain.</p> <p>“Regarding NATO, I have cooled down regarding this question a long time ago, after we understood that NATO is not prepared to accept Ukraine,” Mr. Zelensky said in an interview with ABC News on Tuesday.</p> <p>Ukraine was also willing to discuss how the breakaway territories “will live on,” Mr. Zelensky added. “What is important to me is how the people in those territories are going to live who want to be part of Ukraine. The question is more difficult than simply acknowledging them.”</p> <p>With Russia escalating its bombardment of Ukrainian cities in recent days, there are few signs on the ground that the Kremlin is ready to back down. For Mr. Putin, analysts say, the fate of Ukraine is fundamental to how he sees his legacy: that of a leader who reunited what he claims are historically Russian lands that were divided by the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the early days of the conflict, he repeatedly called on the Ukrainian army to lay down its arms and negotiate, apparently expecting Ukrainians to rally to Russia’s side.</p> <p>But Ukraine’s fierce resistance, and the West’s unity in imposing crushing sanctions, has revealed that Mr. Putin greatly miscalculated. Now, Mr. Timofeev says, the Kremlin must choose “between the lesser of two</p>

evils”: either accept a compromise that could keep a pro-Western government in Kyiv, or fight on, risking enormous casualties both in the Russian army and among Ukrainians.

“He has a clear plan right now to brutalize Ukraine. But to what end?” U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said on Wednesday. “What is his endgame?”

The best option, Mr. Blinken said, was to maintain extreme pressure on Russia and hope that Mr. Putin “will decide to try to finally cut the losses that he’s inflicted on himself and inflicted on the Russian people.”

The United States has avoided engaging at a high level with the Kremlin since the war began, after an intense diplomatic push by Mr. Blinken and President Biden in the months before the invasion. Instead, amid the fighting, some American allies have stepped up their own efforts to halt the war — in particular, Israel and Turkey, which both have close ties to Russia as well as to Ukraine.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett flew to Moscow last Saturday on an urgent mission to see Mr. Putin, making the trip even though it was the Jewish Sabbath. He spoke to Mr. Putin by phone Tuesday, their fifth conversation since the war began.

Israeli officials believe that Mr. Bennett is in a unique position to communicate messages between the two sides because Israel is one of the few countries with a relatively functional relationship with both Kyiv and Moscow. Israel coordinates with Russia over its military activity in Syria and wants to protect the Jewish minorities in both Russia and Ukraine.

In a separate effort, Turkey is also trying to facilitate talks between the two sides. Mevlut Cavusoglu, the Turkish foreign minister, has spoken to Mr. Lavrov, his Russian counterpart, four times and to Mr. Kuleba, his Ukrainian counterpart, six times since the outbreak of war.

Turkey is a NATO ally, has provided Ukraine with lethally effective armed drones and has strong cultural ties to the Crimean Tatar minority in Russian-occupied Crimea. But Mr. Erdogan has also formed a strong personal bond to Mr. Putin and, unlike other NATO leaders, has stopped short of imposing sanctions against Russia over the invasion.

“Turkey’s key position that it is able to talk to both parties is appreciated in the whole world,” Mr. Erdogan said on Wednesday, ahead of the talks between Mr. Lavrov and Mr. Kuleba. “I hope this meeting will crack the door open to a permanent cease-fire.”

A cease-fire would bring relief to the Ukrainian public but it would not necessarily mean the end of the war. Instead, analysts cautioned, both sides could use it to build up strength ahead of a further escalation in the fighting.

“For Ukraine, they would use it to get some civilians into safety but also continue receiving resupply from the West,” said [Ozgur Unluhisarcikli](#), director in Ankara, Turkey, of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. “I am afraid both sides would use such a cease-fire to boost their offensives.”

Russian and Ukrainian officials have already held three rounds of talks in Belarus since the start of the war, clashing over issues such as limited cease-fires and civilian evacuations that could help clear the way for a broader settlement. Mr. Peskov described Thursday’s meeting of foreign ministers, which will take place in the Turkish resort of Antalya, as “a very important continuation of the negotiation process.”

“The Russian position has been formulated and relayed to the Ukrainian negotiators,” Mr. Peskov said. “We are interested in having new rounds of contacts as quickly as possible.”

On Monday, the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said that the Biden administration supports the diplomacy with Mr. Putin by other foreign leaders, including Mr. Bennett, so long as those leaders also

engage with Ukraine's government. She added that the United States also speaks to Mr. Putin's interlocutors "before and after all of these conversations."

Mr. Biden spoke jointly about Ukraine on Friday with President Emmanuel Macron of France and Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany, along with Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain. The White House said that Mr. Macron and Mr. Scholz discussed their recent conversations with the Russian leader.

As for a direct call between Mr. Biden and Mr. Putin, Ms. Psaki said that "now is not the moment," given the Russian leader's "brutal, horrific" invasion.

"But that doesn't mean he will never," she added. "We assess that as time goes on."

Samuel Charap, a former U.S. State Department official and a Russia analyst with the Rand Corporation, said the United States has not prioritized diplomacy over economic and military pressure against Mr. Putin.

"I assume that's because up to this point they think it's a dead end, and there's no convincing the Russians to change their immediate war aims," Mr. Charap said, warning that the approach could limit the possibilities for a diplomatic endgame. "In Putin's view, the president of the United States is the only interlocutor who matters."

He added that direct channels of communication have inherent value even if an agreement looks unlikely, because they can set the stage for later negotiations, avoid misinterpretations and potentially help assuage Mr. Putin's most paranoid beliefs, including that the West is trying to engineer his overthrow.

"Putin's policies and views might be changing, and the only way you can find that out is by talking to him," Mr. Charap said.

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HEADLINE	03/09 Hong Kong Covid crackdown stirs panic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/world/asia/hong-kong-covid-lockdown.html
GIST	<p>HONG KONG — As the government in Hong Kong struggles to contain the city's worst Covid outbreak ever, some residents have panicked. They have emptied supermarket shelves of vegetables and meat. They have raided drugstores for pain and fever medication. Those who could afford it have jumped on flights out of the city.</p> <p>Tens of thousands of new Omicron cases are being reported each day, and deaths have surged. The anxiety gripping Hong Kong is not just about the explosion of infections, but also about what the government will do next. Mixed messages from officials have left residents wondering: Will there be a lockdown? Will we be sent into isolation facilities? Will our children be taken from us if they test positive?</p> <p>Under pressure from Beijing to eliminate infections, Hong Kong officials have vowed to test all 7.4 million residents. Such an operation would require restricting people's movements, but the government has been ambiguous about whether it would impose a lockdown, and if so, when. Just the possibility of one, however, set off the run on groceries and other supplies.</p> <p>"I've been here most of my life, through everything, and it's never come to something like the panic I've seen by the public," said Allan Zeman, 72, a property developer and an adviser to Hong Kong's leader, Carrie Lam.</p> <p>The city's fatality rate from the virus is currently among the world's highest, at three per 100,000 residents, largely because many older Hong Kongers are unvaccinated. (Since the pandemic started, though, Covid has killed Americans at far higher rates than people in other wealthy nations, as well as in Hong Kong.)</p>

Hong Kong is one of the last places in the world that is still trying to eradicate the coronavirus, rather than live with it. It has doubled down on a strategy of isolating every case found, regardless of severity and symptoms, and imposing quarantine orders on people deemed close contacts, despite a shortage of facilities and workers. Rising infections, as well as the government's measures, have already overwhelmed hospitals, morgues, ambulance services and quarantine facilities, and forced understaffed post offices, banks and even prisons to cut back on services.

Residents have been particularly alarmed by the government's approach to children who test positive for the coronavirus. The city erupted in an outcry two weeks ago after health workers took an infected 11-month-old girl from her parents and isolated her in a hospital. One parent is typically allowed to accompany a child, but the hospitals are too crowded, with hundreds of children stuck in Covid isolation wards. Officials later said they would organize video chats to allow hospitalized children to stay in touch with their family members.

Kaylah Tong, a 35-year-old pastor, said that she sent her 2-year-old son to a hospital last month after he had tested positive, with a high fever and convulsions. He stayed alone in an isolation ward for two days.

A doctor had initially warned her that her son could be kept in isolation for weeks because of the hospital's Covid-19 protocols, which include requiring patients to test negative before being discharged. That made Ms. Tong worry about her son's mental health.

"How could children be kept there so long without the parents at their side, just because of quarantine measures? I cannot accept that," she said.

By the third day, though, the hospital let Ms. Tong take her son home to recover; his condition had improved and his hospital bed was needed. The government later said it would temporarily loosen its policy so that only children with severe coronavirus symptoms would need to be hospitalized.

Foreign governments have also responded to Hong Kong's pandemic measures with concern. Citing the risk of familial separation, the United States Consulate last week warned Americans not to travel to Hong Kong. The French consul general acknowledged that the latest measures would "profoundly affect everyone's life, with a price to pay that has been steadily increasing for two years, especially for families with children."

Consular officials have worked to help expatriates find travel arrangements to leave Hong Kong, which has banned flights from nine countries, including the United States, Canada, Britain and Australia. The Swiss Consulate arranged one flight for citizens. The Irish Consulate said it had "never experienced this level of demand for consular service for those wishing to leave."

Hong Kong, a place once known as "Asia's World City," now has some of the strictest travel restrictions, isolating it from the rest of the world. The new uncertainty has driven the largest exodus of residents since the early days of the pandemic in 2020, with more than 70,000 net departures last month, according to data from the Immigration Department.

Weeks earlier, Cordula Kotanko, a German management consultant, and her husband had been thinking about leaving Hong Kong because their three daughters had been struggling with remote learning during much of the pandemic. They were also worried about the prospect of being caught in a citywide lockdown.

Then, late last month, the government said it would bring forward the summer holiday to start in March and April, around four months earlier than usual. Officials said they planned to use schools to conduct mass testing and isolation of the sick. That prompted Ms. Kotanko and her husband to pack their family up and fly to Singapore.

"At that point, we just wanted to get out of Hong Kong in order to act so that we could make decisions and not have decisions made for us," Ms. Kotanko said. "What we experienced in the past two years is that children always come last in Hong Kong and the kids have had to shoulder a lot of the pandemic."

The outbreak and the government's policies have been especially hard on the city's working class. Many service workers have lost their jobs as thousands of businesses went bankrupt. Families who live in tiny apartments have been forced to choose between staying home and infecting relatives or sleeping elsewhere.

The state of grocery stores and pharmacies may be the starkest illustration of how this international hub is buckling under this Omicron surge.

Mannings, one of Hong Kong's best-known drugstore chains, has had to temporarily close dozens of its stores. Various pain medications and Covid testing kits, according to its website, are out of stock. Some other drugstores in the city are out of sanitary napkins and tampons.

ParkShop, a supermarket chain, has limited individual purchases of canned food, toilet paper and medicine. At Wellcome, another supermarket chain, employees put little notes on shelves asking patrons not to hoard vegetables, meat and eggs.

Last Tuesday, Betty Xiao, a graduate student, rushed to the biggest supermarket in Tai Po, a neighborhood in northern Hong Kong where she lives, after her roommate told her that the government might announce a lockdown. Ms. Xiao wanted to stock up on food in case online deliveries of groceries were disrupted.

As she neared the store, she could see a line of customers that snaked around the street. Inside, she said, she and other people were snatching up items straight from cardboard boxes that employees had not even unloaded onto the shelves. Ms. Xiao said she was able to grab the last bag of bread.

"It was a pretty tense atmosphere," Ms. Xiao said. "I had to be fast."

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HEADLINE	03/09 Ontario to drop indoor mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/09/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#ontario-will-drop-its-indoor-mask-mandate-weeks-after-trucker-protests
GIST	<p>Officials in Ontario on Wednesday said that the province was dropping its universal mask mandate, weeks after truckers paralyzed Ottawa during their protests against coronavirus restrictions.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Dr. Kieran Moore, the province's chief medical officer of health, said at a news briefing that the province would end its mask requirement in most places on March 21.</p> <p>"Removing the mask mandate does not mean the risk is gone," he said.</p> <p>The move comes about a month after a caravan of truckers occupied Ottawa's streets for three weeks, enraging residents and encouraging copycat movements, while they protested the Canadian government's pandemic measures.</p> <p>Ontario did not immediately change its policies, but, on March 1, the health authorities lifted a vaccine-verification requirement at local businesses and removed capacity limits indoors.</p> <p>Dr. Moore said on Wednesday that because case trends had generally been "downward or stable" since those restrictions were lifted, most people would not be required to wear masks indoors, including in schools.</p> <p>Masks will still be required on public transportation and at health care facilities, Dr. Moore said.</p> <p>"We are now learning to live with and manage Covid-19 for the long term," he said, adding that he expected to see a small increase in cases and hospitalizations as more people interacted with each other.</p>

	However, Dr. Moore said that people in Ontario should be prepared to wear masks indoors again if another variant emerges or if cases surge during the winter.
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HEADLINE	03/09 San Francisco ends vax proof requirement
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/09/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#san-francisco-will-end-its-proof-of-vaccination-requirement
GIST	<p>San Francisco, one of the first U.S. cities to require vaccine verification at businesses, on Wednesday became the latest to drop the requirement.</p> <p>Starting on Friday, the city will no longer require people to present proof of vaccination before they enter businesses such as restaurants, bars and gyms, the city's public health department said in a statement on Wednesday.</p> <p>"Rolling it back is part of coming out of crisis mode and learning to live with the virus," Dr. Susan Philip, the city's health officer, said in the statement.</p> <p>In August, San Francisco became one of the first cities in the country to require vaccine verification at certain businesses.</p> <p>Local and state authorities across the United States have eased pandemic restrictions as the Omicron wave has rapidly receded. In the last week, Los Angeles County and New York City stopped requiring proof of vaccination to enter certain businesses. But the city of Los Angeles still requires proof.</p> <p>San Francisco lifted its blanket indoor mask mandate last month.</p> <p>Although the vaccine-verification requirement is lifting in San Francisco, the authorities said that individual businesses can still require masks or ask patrons to show proof of vaccination or a negative coronavirus test.</p> <p>The requirement still extends to indoor gatherings of 1,000 or more people, the statement said.</p> <p>San Francisco has long led the country in its pandemic response. The city was among the first to declare a state of emergency two years ago, and it now has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country.</p> <p>Cases swelled after the city reported the United States' first Omicron case in December but have since plummeted, according to a New York Times database.</p> <p>In New York City, about 20 people protested Tuesday night outside a restaurant that requests that indoor diners provide proof of vaccination, a day after the city dropped its vaccine mandate.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Trucker convoy near D.C. low-key protest
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/us/trucker-convoy-washington-dc.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article
GIST	<p>HAGERSTOWN, Md. — When a convoy of trucks pulled out of Southern California last month, rolling toward the U.S. capital just days after the police in Canada cracked down on a legion of truckers occupying Ottawa, Washington braced for their arrival. The Department of Homeland Security issued a warning, and members of the National Guard were deployed, along with hundreds of city police officers.</p> <p>But this week, when the caravan of semis, pickups and R.V.s that had assembled in protest of vaccine mandates and other coronavirus restrictions reached the capital region, downtown Washington was business as usual.</p>

The convoy's organizers say that it is early, that their restraint has been strategic and that protesters are in it for the long haul. They have managed to obtain audiences with various Republican politicians, including Senators Ted Cruz of Texas and Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, who nodded approvingly. And though mask mandates and local vaccine requirements have been rolled back across the country, including in Washington, the convoy's leaders insist they are not leaving until all vaccine mandates are lifted.

"We're going to continue to increase that pressure," said Brian Brase, a trucker from northwestern Ohio and one of the convoy's organizers. "They understand that we're in their backyard."

The pressure, so far, has been relatively low.

Though there may have been many thousands of people cheering from roadsides or donating supplies along the convoy's cross-country route, there now appear to be a few hundred coming and going at the protest's base camp, the Hagerstown Speedway, a stock racecar track 80 miles northwest of the city — truckers, but also pastors, store owners and a variety of right-wing activists.

The protests begin most mornings — though not Wednesday, when things were put off because of rain and possible snow — with hundreds of vehicles leaving the speedway amid a chorus of rousing honks. They head down Interstate 70 and make a midday lap or two around the 64-mile Capital Beltway at the legal speed limit, noticeable largely by the pro-Trump and anti-Biden bunting flapping behind them.

In the evening, the convoy returns to the speedway, which has become a combination tent revival and tailgate party, with a communal food station, a barber, vendors selling pro-Trump merchandise, huge stacks of boxes containing Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s anti-vaccine books, people in costumes and livestreamers everywhere you look.

It is a far cry from the downtown encampment in Ottawa, where 18-wheelers blocked off city streets, aggravating local residents and nettling the police. As the days go by, however, more than a few within the convoy have begun to question whether the daily circuits around the Beltway are enough.

"The laps are OK for a lot of people," said Todd Church, 45, who joined the convoy in Indiana. "It's not my choice. But I don't want any heavy-handed protests."

There is no shortage of defiance at the speedway, where people lament how pandemic restrictions have upended their lives and how they have been estranged from their families over their distrust of vaccines. Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the White House chief medical adviser, should be jailed, one sign says. The graffiti on a truck declares that "mandates = slavery." But the specter of the last big right-wing protest in Washington, which led to the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol in 2021, hangs over the protest like diesel fumes.

"I would like to see us in D.C.," said William Kyle Glenn, 36, wearing a battle helmet with a face mask painted red, white and blue. But he added, mentioning Jan. 6, "I feel like it's a trap."

Many people in the truck convoy seem to fear that if they went to Washington, the government would trick them into a confrontation, insisting, without a basis in fact, that this is what happened on Jan. 6.

Several of the convoy's initial organizers had direct connections to the actual events of Jan. 6 and the chaotic postelection period that preceded them.

One of the convoy's earliest planners, Leigh Dundas, was a lawyer for an anti-vaccine group whose leader was charged with entering the Capitol that day. Ms. Dundas herself was videotaped the day before the riot broke out urging on a pro-Trump crowd with calls to kill any "alleged Americans" who might have helped undermine the 2020 election.

The America Project, a group that supported the convoy from its infancy, is run by Patrick Byrne, the former chief executive of Overstock.com. Mr. Byrne, working with Michael T. Flynn, who was national security adviser under President Donald J. Trump, took part in [a plot](#) to persuade Mr. Trump to use the military to seize voting machines in a bid to stay in office.

Organizers have defended the presence of some far-right figures, saying they have been unfairly maligned by the left, but they also have said that they are policing their ranks for extremists.

On Monday at the speedway, a woman dressed in red, white and blue spandex, who calls herself the Q Patriot, stood up on the flatbed truck that serves as the convoy's main stage. "Jan. 6 was the most patriotic day of my life," she began, but as she launched into the reading of a poem, which included the phrase, "We know who was really behind 9/11," the sound suddenly cut off.

It is unclear what happened there. But Mr. Brase insisted in general that the convoy must stay on message. "There's a lot of bad actors out there that want to get involved to try to find a way to take us down," he said.

Beyond the tactics of the convoy, there is the question of aims. As the Omicron variant has rapidly receded, Covid-19 policies and the debate around them have faded as well, and attention has turned to the war in Ukraine, inflation and soaring gas prices.

Still, Mr. Brase insists that there are plenty of mandates left to fight, above all the requirement that federal employees be vaccinated, an order currently blocked in the courts. He has also demanded that President Biden end the ongoing Covid-related national emergency declaration, which first went into effect under Mr. Trump in March 2020 and which, convoy leaders charge, led to a range of constitutional abuses.

But while some in Washington remain puzzled about the convoy's purpose, Mr. Brase is emphatic about what it is not. He repeatedly points out that it has not broken any laws, nor even particularly inconvenienced anyone. And while the convoy can look like a Trump boat parade on wheels, the leaders are adamant that its cause is not partisan and they even cautioned local organizers along the route not to turn it into a Trump rally.

Still, whether the convoy achieves its stated aims should not be confused with whether it has been effective, said Lara Putnam, a professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh who has researched and participated in the surge of political activism arising from the 2017 Women's March. She compared the explosion of activity on local Facebook pages planning for the trucker convoy to the flurry of postcard writing and organizing by the grass-roots anti-Trump groups that sprouted up in 2017. "People were putting in time and energy making peanut butter sandwiches, getting their kids involved," Professor Putnam said. Agree with the convoy or not, "that's a social movement."

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HEADLINE	03/09 WHO: Americas disproportionately affected
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/09/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#who-new-covid-cases-americas
GIST	<p>The Americas continue to be disproportionately affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and it is too soon for countries in the region to relax public health measures, World Health Organization officials warned on Wednesday.</p> <p>Though the region is home to less than 13 percent of the world's population, the Americas reported 63 percent of the world's new known coronavirus cases in the first two months of 2022, Dr. Carissa Etienne said at a news conference Wednesday. Dr. Etienne is the director of the Pan American Health Organization, a regional arm of the W.H.O.</p>

Of the [six million people known to have died](#) around the world from Covid-19 so far, more than 2.6 million have been in the Americas. Peru leads the world with the [highest number of known deaths per 100,000 people](#) over the course of the pandemic.

“This is a tragedy of enormous proportions, and its effects will be felt for years to come,” Dr. Etienne said.

She noted that more than 148 million people in the region, which includes the United States, had contracted the virus in the two years since the W.H.O. officially declared a pandemic [on March 11, 2020](#), and that many of them are likely to face long-term effects on their health.

Overall, new case reports and deaths are declining in the Americas, as they are globally, though Dr. Etienne noted that new cases were still rising in the Caribbean. A decrease in testing may be masking the true prevalence of the virus in the Americas, she said.

Dr. Etienne said countries in the region should remain cautious. “We all want the pandemic to be over, but optimism alone cannot control the virus,” she said. “It is too soon to lower our guard.”

Though some countries in the region, and many parts of the United States, have been easing public health measures recently, “I’m afraid there’s no going back to normal at this time,” Dr. Etienne said. “We need to continue with some of the measures that have proven to be effective, and in particular we need to ramp up the vaccination coverage.”

Some 248 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean have yet to receive a single dose of vaccine, according to P.A.H.O., with wide disparities in vaccination rates from country to country. Of the more than 40 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean, just 14 have managed to fully vaccinate 70 percent of their residents or more, according to P.A.H.O. data; Haiti has fully vaccinated less than 2 percent.

“We must build on lessons from the past two years to prepare for quick action if a new variant emerges, or outbreaks happen among those who remain vulnerable,” Dr. Etienne said.

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HEADLINE	03/09 UAE could undermine oligarchs' sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/us/russian-oligarchs-sanctions-dubai.html
GIST	<p>Stretching into the Persian Gulf from the beaches and skyscrapers of Dubai is a man-made archipelago in the shape of a vast palm tree, its branchlike rows of islands lined with luxury hotels, apartments and villas.</p> <p>Among the owners of those homes are two dozen close allies of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, including a former provincial governor and nuclear power plant manager, a construction magnate and former senator, and a Belarusian tobacco tycoon.</p> <p>At least 38 businessmen or officials linked to Mr. Putin own dozens of properties in Dubai collectively valued at more than \$314 million, according to previously unreported data compiled by the nonprofit Center for Advanced Defense Studies. Six of those owners are under sanctions by the United States or the European Union, and another oligarch facing sanctions has a yacht moored there. For now, they can count themselves lucky.</p> <p>Since the invasion of Ukraine, much of the world has imposed sweeping sanctions on Russian financial institutions and the circle around Mr. Putin, and even notoriously secretive banking centers like Switzerland, Monaco and the Cayman Islands have begun to cooperate with the freezing of accounts, seizing of mansions and impounding of yachts.</p> <p>But not Dubai, the cosmopolitan resort and financial center in the United Arab Emirates. Although a close partner to Washington in Middle Eastern security matters, the oil-rich monarchy has in recent years also become a popular playground for the Russian rich, in part because of its reputation for asking few</p>

questions about the sources of foreign money. Now the Emirates may undercut some of the penalties on Russia by continuing to welcome targeted oligarchs.

“Sanctions are only as strong as the weakest link,” said Adam M. Smith, a lawyer and former adviser to the U.S. Treasury Department office that administers such measures. “Any financial center that is willing to do business when others are not could provide a leak in the dike and undermine the overall measures.”

The Emirati stance is exposing tensions between the United States and several of its closest Arab allies over their reluctance to oppose the Russian invasion. Asked for solidarity in a moment of crisis, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have instead prioritized relations with Moscow — the Emirates and Saudi Arabia by rebuffing American pleas for increased oil supplies to soothe energy markets, Egypt by muffling criticism of the invasion while proceeding with a \$25 billion loan from Russia to finance a nuclear power plant.

“It should be a clarifying moment,” said Michael Hanna, U.S. program director for the nonprofit International Crisis Group. “That has to be pretty bracing.”

The U.A.E. may be the most conspicuous in its position, if only because it currently holds a rotating seat on the United Nations Security Council. The Emiratis abstained from an American-backed resolution denouncing the invasion, declining to criticize Russia. And Emirati officials have reassured Russians that their authorities will not enforce sanctions unless mandated by the United Nations — where Moscow’s veto ensures against it.

“If we are not violating any international laws, then nobody should blame Dubai, or the U.A.E., or any other country for trying to accommodate whoever comes in a legitimate way,” said Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, a political analyst close to the U.A.E.’s rulers. “So what’s the big deal? I don’t see why the West would complain.”

Russians in Dubai say they appreciate the hospitality. “Having a Russian passport or Russian money now is very toxic — no one wants to accept you, except places like Dubai,” said a Russian businessman who took refuge there, speaking on the condition of anonymity for fear of alienating Emirati authorities. “There’s no issue with being a Russian in Dubai.”

He shared an electronic invitation circulating among Russians in the city: a rooftop cocktail party for venture capitalists and cryptocurrency start-ups. (The Treasury Department on Monday warned banks to watch for Russians using cryptocurrency to evade sanctions.)

An Arab businessman who rents high-end furnished apartments in Dubai described “incredible demand” from Russians since the invasion, with one family taking an indefinite lease on a three-bedroom waterfront apartment for \$15,000 a month and more than 50 other individuals or families seeking accommodations.

The Center for Advanced Defense Studies, a Washington-based nonprofit that collects data on global conflicts, found that Putin allies owned at least 76 properties in Dubai, either directly or under the name of a close relative, and said that there were likely many others who could not be identified.

The center’s list of those under sanctions includes: Aleksandr Borodai, a Duma member who acted as prime minister of a Ukrainian province in 2014 when it was taken over by Russian-backed separatists; Bekkhan Agaev, a Duma member whose family owns a petroleum company; and Aliaksey Aleksin, the Belarusian tobacco titan. A handful of oligarchs on the list own homes valued at more than \$25 million each.

Maritime records show that in recent days the yacht belonging to the sanctioned oligarch Andrei Skoch, a steel magnate and Duma member, has been moored off Dubai.

A Bombardier business jet owned by Arkady Rotenberg, another Russian billionaire under sanctions, landed on Friday, and the planes and boats of other oligarchs discussed as possible targets have been

coming and going, too. The yachts of at least three other oligarchs are currently docked in Dubai. The 220-foot vessel of a Russian metals magnate appears to be en route from the Seychelles. The Boeing 787 Dreamliner owned by Roman Abramovich, the Russian-born owner of Britain's Chelsea soccer team, took off from the airport on Friday. A 460-foot superyacht belonging to another oligarch set sail the same day; he was added to Europe's sanctions list on Wednesday.

Moscow has been quietly building closer ties to the U.A.E. and other Western-leaning Arab states for a decade, seeking to capitalize on complaints about Washington.

The autocrats who dominate the region were outraged by Washington's statements of support for the Arab uprisings in 2011. The Arab monarchs of the Persian Gulf cried betrayal at the Obama administration's deal with their adversary Iran over its nuclear program. Their frustration only grew when the Trump administration did nothing to retaliate for a series of apparent Iranian attacks against them.

Now people close to those rulers say that their neutral responses to the invasion of Ukraine should teach Washington not to take them for granted.

"The automatic expectation in D.C. is that 'you Saudis now must jump on the bandwagon and isolate Russia as we have,'" said Ali Shihabi, a Saudi political analyst close to the royal court, but the kingdom cannot "burn" its relationship with Russia just to please the White House.

"Our relationship is there with the Americans," he added, "but it is not going to be a monogamous relationship because the Americans are unreliable."

Others noted that the Kremlin had overlooked human rights abuses that Washington often criticized, and that relations with an alternative power gave the Arab states more leverage. "It's useful for Arab countries to take this stance," said Mustapha Al-Sayyid, a political science professor at Cairo University.

Russia has sold weapons to all three countries, and a few Saudi military officers have begun training in Russia. Egypt and the U.A.E. have cooperated with Russia for several years in Libya, where all three have backed the same strongman in Eastern Libya in his conflict with the U.N.-backed government. Egypt provided bases near the border, the U.A.E. sent fighter planes and Russia deployed mercenaries.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, the de facto ruler of the United Arab Emirates, visited Moscow at least six times between 2013 and 2018. When Mr. Putin visited the Emirati capital, Abu Dhabi, the next year, the city lit up landmarks in Russian colors and repainted its police cars with Russian banners and Cyrillic script.

Other entanglements bind their interests too, including the ongoing civil war in Yemen pitting partisans backed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against others favored by Iran.

During a U.N. Security Council session last week, Russia unexpectedly supported an Emirati resolution to label the Iranian-backed fighters "terrorists." Analysts sympathetic to the U.A.E. argued that it had won Moscow's backing in part by abstaining from the resolution denouncing the Ukraine invasion.

Russia, though, has also used financial ties to pull the Gulf Arabs closer, partly through its state-controlled Russian Direct Investment Fund and its chief executive, Kirill Dmitriev, who last week was added to the sanctions list.

Created in 2011 to lure foreign capital to invest in Russia in partnership with its government, the fund initially courted Wall Street. Mr. Dmitriev, a Russian with degrees from Stanford University and the Harvard Business School, had once worked at a U.S. government-sponsored fund to invest in the former Soviet Union. For the Russian fund, he recruited an advisory board that included Stephen Schwarzman of the Blackstone Group and Leon Black of Apollo Global Management.

But the American financiers and money fled when Russia invaded Crimea in 2014. So Mr. Dmitriev turned east — securing investments worth more than \$5 billion from the U.A.E. and more than \$10 billion from Saudi Arabia. He also acted as an informal Russian envoy to the Gulf monarchs, talking foreign policy as well as money.

Mr. Dmitriev's double role became especially clear after the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The Mueller report on Russian interference in the vote detailed how he had worked with Emirati leaders to try to connect on behalf of the Kremlin with those around Donald J. Trump — eventually preparing a short plan for “reconciliation” with Russia and getting it into the hands of Jared Kushner, the former president's son-in-law and adviser, who shared it with top White House officials.

Rich Russians, though, have reasons other than geopolitics to buy property in Dubai. The sheikhs who ruled the city-state have long sought to attract business by allowing a high degree of secrecy about asset ownership and by sharing only limited information with other jurisdictions, said Maíra Martini, a researcher with Transparency International, which campaigns against corruption.

“Dubai has been a key player in most of the big corruption or money-laundering schemes in recent years,” she said, citing recent scandals involving Russian businessmen, the daughter of Angola's former president, top Namibian fishing regulators and South Africa's Gupta family.

Citing such failings, the Financial Action Task Force, an influential money-laundering watchdog, on Friday put the United Arab Emirates on its “gray” list.

A thriving colony of Russians in Dubai has made it a welcoming alternative to oligarch gathering spots like London's Kensington neighborhood or the French Riviera. The Russian Business Council, a Dubai-based nonprofit, estimates that there are about 3,000 Russian-owned Emirati companies. The Russian embassy in the United Arab Emirates has said that about 100,000 Russian-speakers live in the country. About a million Russians visit each year. A Russian broadcaster, Tatiana Vishnevskaya, has built a career out of promoting life and commerce in Dubai. New real estate developments pop up “like mushrooms on a sunny day after the rain,” she recently told a tourism industry website.

A Russian company, the Bulldozer Group, owns a dozen upscale restaurants and nightclubs in Dubai, including the local Cipriani outpost. Caviar Kaspia, a French-Russian night spot, boasts of the “largest Vodka selection in Dubai.”

As in the current campaign against Russia, Dubai resisted earlier American-led sanctions against Iran, starting in 2006. Although the United Arab Emirates and Iran are opponents in regional politics, Dubai and Iran sit a short boat ride away across the Strait of Hormuz, and share trade and family ties going back centuries.

But after six years, pressure from Washington and the emirate of Abu Dhabi forced greater compliance on sanctions from Dubai's big financial institutions, said Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, an economist at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Yet since 2019, when Abu Dhabi began reopening diplomatic contacts with Tehran, Emirati trade with Iran has quietly risen again, he said.

“They can calibrate it and turn it up and down,” Mr. Batmanghelidj added.

Emirati officials, seeking to get off the money-laundering “gray” list, are already pledging new transparency measures. Those steps could also limit the ability of sanctioned oligarchs to hide assets or move money in Dubai.

Cutting some Russian institutions off the international system for electronic bank transfers, called SWIFT, has already made it harder for them to do business with Dubai. And if Washington threatens to restrict Emirati access to the American financial system — as during the early years of the Iran sanctions — that could motivate the Emiratis to cooperate more.

Still, Washington often weighs its partnerships in military and intelligence matters against other priorities, including the enforcement of sanctions.

“The question,” said David H. Laufman, a lawyer who previously worked as a senior official in the national security division of the Justice Department, “is going to be how hard the Biden administration leans on the U.A.E. to get with the program.”

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HEADLINE	03/09 SKorea conservative leader wins election
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/world/asia/south-korea-election-yoon-suk-yeol.html
GIST	<p>SEOUL — A graft prosecutor turned opposition leader has won an extremely close presidential election in South Korea, reinstating conservatives to power with calls for a more confrontational stance against North Korea and a stronger alliance with the United States.</p> <p>With 98 percent of the votes counted, the opposition leader, Yoon Suk-yeol, was leading by a margin of 263,000 votes, or 0.8 percentage points, when his opponent conceded early Thursday. It was South Korea’s tightest race since it began holding free presidential elections in 1987.</p> <p>Mr. Yoon will replace President Moon Jae-in, a progressive leader whose single five-year term ends in May.</p> <p>The election was widely seen as a referendum on Mr. Moon’s government. Its failure to curb skyrocketing housing prices angered voters. So did #MeToo and corruption scandals involving Mr. Moon’s political allies, as well as a lack of progress in rolling back North Korea’s nuclear weapons program.</p> <p>“This was not an election for the future but an election looking back to judge the Moon administration,” said Prof. Ahn Byong-jin, a political scientist at Kyung Hee University in Seoul. “By electing Yoon, people wanted to punish Moon’s government they deemed incompetent and hypocritical and to demand a fairer society.”</p> <p>But, as the close results showed, the electorate was closely divided, with many voters lamenting a choice between “unlikables.”</p> <p>Mr. Yoon’s opponent, Lee Jae-myung of the governing Democratic Party, acknowledged his country’s rifts in his concession speech. “I sincerely ask the president-elect to lead the country over the divide and conflict and open an era of unity and harmony,” he said.</p> <p>The victory for Mr. Yoon, who is 61, returns conservatives back to power after five years in the political wilderness. His People Power Party had been in disarray following the impeachment of its leader, President Park Geun-hye, whom Mr. Yoon helped convict and imprison on corruption charges. Mr. Yoon, who also went after another former president and the head of Samsung, was recruited by the party to engineer a conservative revival.</p> <p>The election was watched closely by both South Korea’s neighbors and the United States government. Mr. Yoon’s election might upend the current president’s progressive agenda, especially his policy of seeking dialogue and peace with North Korea. As president, Mr. Moon has met with North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-un, three times, though that did nothing to stop Mr. Kim from rapidly expanding his nuclear weapons program.</p> <p>Mr. Yoon has vehemently criticized Mr. Moon’s approach on North Korea, as well as toward China. He insists that U.N. sanctions should be enforced until North Korea is completely denuclearized, a stance that aligns more closely with Washington’s than with Mr. Moon’s, and is anathema to North Korea. Mr. Yoon has also called for ratcheting up joint military drills between South Korea and the United States — which were scaled down under Mr. Moon — another stance likely to rile North Korea, which may now raise tensions through more weapons tests.</p>

“Peace is meaningless unless it is backed by power,” Mr. Yoon said during the campaign. “War can be avoided only when we acquire an ability to launch pre-emptive strikes and show our willingness to use them.”

Mr. Moon has kept a balance between the United States, South Korea’s most important ally, and China, its biggest trading partner — an approach known as “strategic ambiguity.” Mr. Yoon said he would show “strategic clarity,” and favor Washington. He called the rivalry between the two great powers “a contest between liberalism and authoritarianism.”

North Korea will likely pose Mr. Yoon’s first foreign policy crisis.

It has conducted a [flurry of missile tests](#) this year and might consider Mr. Yoon’s confrontational rhetoric the prod it needs to escalate tensions further.

“We will see North Korea return to a [power-for-power](#) standoff, at least in the early part of Yoon’s term,” said Lee Byong-chul, a North Korea expert at Kyungnam University’s Institute for Far Eastern Studies in Seoul.

Mr. Yoon served as prosecutor general under Mr. Moon. His political stock rose among conservative South Koreans when he resigned last year and became a bitter critic of his former boss. Pre-election surveys had indicated that South Koreans would vote for Mr. Yoon less because they liked him than to show their anger at Mr. Moon and his Democratic Party.

“This was such a hot and heated race,” Mr. Yoon told a gathering of supporters at the National Assembly Library. “But the competition is over and now it’s time for us to join our forces together for the people and the nation.”

His election comes as South Korea is [projecting influence around the world](#) as never before. The small nation of 52 million people has long [punched above its weight in manufacturing](#) and technology, but more recently has added [film, television and music](#) to its list of successful global exports.

At home, however, voters are deeply unhappy.

Home prices are out of reach. The country has one of the world’s lowest birthrates, with the population falling for the first time on record in 2021 as economic uncertainty makes young people [reluctant to marry or have children](#). Legions of people fresh out of college complain about a lack of job opportunities, often accusing older generations of hanging onto their jobs. And both [anti-immigrant](#) and [anti-feminist](#) sentiment are on the rise.

The deepening uncertainty, made worse by [two years of Covid restrictions](#), has left many, especially [young people](#), anxious about the future.

“We are the betrayed generation,” said Kim Go-eun, 31, who works for a convenience store chain. “We have been taught that if we studied and worked hard, we would have a decent job and economically stable life. None of that has come true.

“No matter how hard we try, we don’t see a chance to join the middle class,” she said.

The campaign also exposed a nation deeply divided over [gender conflicts](#). Mr. Yoon was accused of pandering to widespread sentiment [against China](#) and [against feminists](#) among young men, whose support proved crucial to his victory. Exit polls showed the voters in their 20s split sharply along the gender line, with men favoring Mr. Yoon and women Mr. Lee.

	<p>Young men said they were gravitating toward Mr. Yoon because he spoke to some of their deepest concerns, like the fear that an influx of immigrants and a growing feminist movement would further erode their job opportunities. Professor Ahn likened the phenomenon to “Trumpism.”</p> <p>“We may not be completely satisfied with Yoon, but he is the only hope we've got,” said Kim Seong-heon, 26, a university student in Seoul who lives in a windowless room barely big enough to squeeze in a bed and closet.</p> <p>Mr. Yoon promised deregulation to spur investment. He also promised 2.5 million new homes to make housing more affordable.</p> <p>But the newly elected president may face fierce resistance at the National Assembly, where Mr. Moon’s Democratic Party holds a majority. Mr. Yoon’s campaign promise to abolish the country’s ministry of gender equality may prove particularly contentious.</p> <p>He also has to contend with a bitter, disillusioned public.</p> <p>New allegations of legal and ethical misconduct emerged almost daily to cast doubt on Mr. Yoon and his wife, Kim Keon-hee, as well as on his rival, Mr. Lee.</p> <p>Many voters felt they were left with an unappealing choice.</p> <p>“It was not about whom you liked better but about whom you hated less,” said Jeong Sang-min, 35, a logistics official at an international apparel company.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Bloodied Mariupol plans mass graves
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/world/europe/ukraine-mariupol-siege.html
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine — Marina Levinchuk said she received an alarming text message from the local authorities in the besieged city of Mariupol several days ago, before she decided to flee. “If somebody dies in your family,” she said, recalling the message in her own words, “just put the body outside, cover it, tie up the hands and the legs and leave it outside.”</p> <p>“That’s what’s going on in Mariupol now,” she said of the city, currently ringed by Russian forces pounding it with bombs, missiles and artillery, and hitting a maternity hospital on Wednesday. “There are just bodies lying in the streets.</p> <p>“There is no water, no heating, no gas,” she continued in a video call on WhatsApp on Wednesday. “And they are collecting snow, melting the snow, and boiling the snow.”</p> <p>It has been seven days since Russian forces encircled the city, an important port on Ukraine’s southern coast, and began to lay siege to the roughly half a million people living there. Most communications with the outside world were severed, leaving primarily those with access to satellite phones to alert Ukraine and the rest of the world to the increasingly dire state of affairs.</p> <p>Having failed to defeat the Ukrainian army in the war’s first weeks, and encountering stiff resistance in major cities like Mariupol, Kharkiv and Kyiv, Russian commanders appear to be resorting to tactics used in previous wars in Chechnya and Syria: flattening cities with overwhelming and indiscriminate firepower.</p> <p>A video uploaded to Facebook on Wednesday evening showed the center of Mariupol after an aerial bombardment. It looked like a wasteland, with tree branches singed, windows blasted out of entire apartment blocks and the destroyed maternity hospital.</p> <p>Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelensky, condemned the strike on the hospital, berating world powers for failing to stop the killing and echoing his calls for NATO to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine.</p>

“Mariupol. Direct Strike of Russian troops at the maternity hospital,” he wrote in a Twitter post Wednesday afternoon. “People, children are under the wreckage. Atrocity! How much longer will the world be an accomplice ignoring terror? Close the sky right now! Stop the killings! You have power but you seem to be losing humanity.”

In all, 17 people were injured in the hospital attack, including staff members and maternity ward patients, Pavlo Kyrylenko, the regional governor, told a Ukrainian television station.

Efforts to negotiate a cease-fire to give civilians a chance to escape have failed repeatedly. For three days, the prospect of relief reaching the city through a “humanitarian corridor” fell apart in a hail of mortar and artillery fire.

The fighting around the city has been some of the most intense of the war, residents who managed to escape the conflict say.

“There was shelling all the time. There was bombing,” said Juliia Diderko, a 33-year-old journalist from Mariupol who slipped out of the city just after it was encircled by Russian soldiers. “If anyone can help, please do this,” she said. “Please do this right now. Because people are dying.”

Residents are doing what they can to survive, for themselves and others in need, Ms. Levinchuk said. Trees are being cut down and food is being prepared outside, because there is no electricity or gas.

“All the neighbors, they are helping each other, sharing the food and the water if they have it,” added Ms. Levinchuk, 28, “and people are trying to survive like this.”

Mariupol has long been seen as a potential flash point, commanding a strategic land corridor between the Kremlin-backed breakaway enclaves in Ukraine’s east and Crimea, the territory annexed by Moscow in 2014. Control of Mariupol would not only enable Russia to send supplies and reinforcements to forces farther west, but would also cut Ukrainian shipping off from the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea beyond.

The city’s mayor, Vadym Boichenko, has refused to surrender. He has also complained that it is difficult to count the dead because the bombardment never stops.

The local authorities are planning to dig mass graves to accommodate all the bodies, including that of a 6-year-old-girl named Tanya who they say died of dehydration on Tuesday after her mother was killed. It was, said Mr. Zelensky, “the first time in decades, apparently, since the Nazi invasion,” that a child died of dehydration in Mariupol.

Ms. Levinchuk, who left behind her husband of seven months and a newly renovated house, made it safely to a city in western Ukraine after 30 hours of driving. But her husband, Alexander, and her parents, who are in their late 60s, stayed behind, and she fears constantly for their lives and their health.

The windows in her parents’ house were blown out when their neighborhood was heavily bombed, she said, but “thank God my parents have a roof.”

Alexander’s parents’ house on the left bank of the Kalmius River, where much of the initial bombing was concentrated, was completely destroyed, so they left along with Ms. Levinchuk. She worries about her parents, left there shivering in their windowless house with temperatures dropping below freezing most nights.

Explosions continue to rock the city, making a “very, very bad situation” for the older residents and those with disabilities, a member of Doctors Without Borders in Mariupol said in an audio message made available to The New York Times. “They cannot find even food, and they cannot create a fire for themselves to cook their food.”

Conditions are also deteriorating for parents and their children, he said, “because they need much, much, more and different supplies and hygiene, and they do not find it anywhere now.”

Maj. Denis Prokopenko, with the Azov battalion defending the city, appealed to the international community for more help.

“Innocent people in Mariupol city are almost starving, this is happening now, it is happening in modern Europe,” he said in a video uploaded to Facebook. Explosions could be heard nearby.

“Attempts to organize a safe corridor for the evacuation of Mariupol failed because of several actions of the enemy,” he said, saying the Russian forces had shelled locations where civilians were assembling to board buses to leave the city.

“If a no-fly zone over Ukraine is not provided soon we will not be able to manage the supply of water and food, medicine, as well as to evacuate people safely,” he said.

Mariupol is only 35 miles from the Russian border, and its residents once regularly traveled there. Back in 2014, people in Mariupol watched the Maidan protests that ousted the country’s pro-Moscow president and felt uncomfortable, Ms. Levinchuk said.

“We didn’t want to go to Europe because we felt like we were a part of Russia, we were really close,” she said, “like brother and sister.”

But that began to change when war broke out in 2014 between Russian-backed separatists and Kyiv. The separatist forces held Mariupol for a month during that conflict, before the Ukrainian government took it back. That experience and seeing what happened in the nearby separatist enclaves and in Russia in the intervening years turned the city’s residents against Moscow, Ms. Levinchuk said.

“In these eight years, everything has changed because now, nobody wants to go to Russia,” she said. “We feel like we are Ukrainian.”

As the relationship between Mariupol and Russia has soured, so, too, has Ms. Levinchuk’s relationship with her brother Misha, 47, who moved to Russia in 2014 to get away from the war. Now, because of an information blackout in Russia, he has no idea what is happening to the city of their birth — making Ms. Levinchuk one of many Ukrainians whose Russian relatives have responded to news of the brutality of the invasion with denial.

“He’s calling to me and I’m quite surprised because he’s telling me that Russia tried to make people free,” she said.

“Misha, our Mom is dying without water, without heat, she has nothing,” she said she responded. “And you were telling me that Russia is trying to make Ukraine free?”

“They made our mother free from electricity, from heating, from food, from water,” she said, choking back tears. “And probably they will make us free of her life as well.”

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HEADLINE	03/09 Employers still scrambling to fill vacancies
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/business/economy/job-openings-us-january-2022.html
GIST	<p>Job openings in the United States and the number of workers quitting their jobs remained near record highs in January, an indicator of demand for labor and of worker leverage.</p> <p>The data, released by the Labor Department on Wednesday as part of its monthly Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, or JOLTS report, was another sign of an economy that wobbled slightly yet remained sturdy when faced with the Omicron wave of the coronavirus this winter.</p>

Job openings dipped to 11.3 million, down slightly from a record in December, but were still up about 61 percent from February 2020.

In a potential sign of the impact wrought by the variant's spread, several industries that had been rebounding from the pandemic, and had been most hungry for workers, reported fewer job openings. Accommodation and food services experienced a drop of 288,000. Transportation, warehousing and utilities reported 132,000 fewer openings. But openings continued to increase in both manufacturing and the service sector at large.

Some 4.3 million people left their jobs voluntarily in January, edging down somewhat from the record 4.5 million who quit in November. While layoffs picked up slightly in January, they were still hovering above historical lows.

For Jeffrey Roach, the chief economist at LPL Financial, the most fascinating current in the labor market is the increased share of workers who are quitting jobs not to make a career change but simply to achieve higher pay.

"You can see people are actually staying within their industry — and it really helps the 'lower-skilled' worker," he said. "I think we'll continue to see really high churn rates."

The share of Americans in their prime working years — ages 25 to 54 — who were either working or looking for work plummeted in 2020, yet it has recovered to a rate of 79.5 percent, within 1 percentage point of prepandemic levels, a much faster rebound than occurred after the last downturn.

The prevailing environment is likely to increase the price of labor — a welcome development for workers who have dealt with stagnant wages and a lack of power for decades, and an unsettling one for employers as high inflation increases the cost of doing business.

Some business executives and managers have expressed concern — in corporate earnings and in private calls — that "wage inflation" could set in and cut into profits if the rapid wage gains that workers achieved last year don't taper off.

"When it comes to their business, they're very concerned about it: What does that mean to their margins going forward? What kind of pricing power do they have?" said Steve Wyett, chief investment strategist at BOK Financial, a regional bank based in Oklahoma, where unemployment is notably low at 2.8 percent. "How do we protect ourselves against this?"

Data from the [Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta](#) shows that workers who quit to take other jobs are receiving larger pay increases than those who are staying put, though much of this movement is in lower-wage sectors.

After the Labor Department's employment survey showed strong wage gains in January, [hourly earnings were nearly flat](#) in February. And even if wage gains stay strong, they remain far from runaway levels. Fed data shows that median annual pay increases in the American labor market have been well within the range — 3 to 7 percent — that prevailed from the 1980s until the 2007-9 recession.

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HEADLINE	03/09 Russia's ruble continues to slide
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/business/russia-ruble-central-bank.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link back to briefing
GIST	Russia's currency continued its descent on Wednesday as trading in the ruble was restarted on the Moscow Exchange. But in an effort to stanch the currency's decline, the Russian central bank issued an order further restricting access to U.S. dollars.

The Central Bank of Russia said on Wednesday that owners of foreign-currency accounts in Russian banks would be allowed to withdraw only up to \$10,000 in dollars (regardless of the currency in the account), and that the rest would have to be taken out in rubles. New foreign-currency accounts can be opened, but only rubles will be permitted to be withdrawn. The order will be in place until Sept. 9, the central bank said. Until then, banks cannot sell foreign currency to Russians, either.

The measures seem intended to curb the ability of Russian citizens to convert their rubles into dollars or other currencies, as the central bank tries to support the national currency, which is rapidly losing its purchasing power.

Russia's ruble has lost about 40 percent of its value against the U.S. dollar this year as Western leaders have moved to isolate the country from the global economy with sanctions in response to its invasion of Ukraine. Those moves, which include the [freezing of Russian central bank assets](#) that are held in the United States, will make it [harder for the country to prop up its currency](#).

Since currency trading on the Moscow Exchange was halted on Friday, the United States and Britain said they would [stop importing Russian oil](#), while the [European Union](#) laid out a plan to reduce its dependency on Russian energy, and Fitch Ratings said a default on Russia's sovereign debt was "imminent."

"The further ratcheting up of sanctions, and proposals that could limit trade in energy, increase the probability of a policy response by Russia that includes at least selective nonpayment of its sovereign debt obligations," Fitch Ratings said on Tuesday.

The ruble was trading at 117 to the U.S. dollar in Russia on Wednesday, after closing at 105 rubles to the U.S. dollar on Friday. Trading in rubles in global currency markets, which was very limited, priced the ruble at about 139 to the U.S. dollar.

Trading on the Moscow stock market is still halted, the central bank said. It last traded on Feb. 25.

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HEADLINE	03/09 Stocks rebound as oil prices retreat
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/09/business/stocks-economy-inflation-ukraine?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout_link_back_to_briefing#stocks-rebound-after-days-of-declines-as-oil-prices-retreat
GIST	<p>Wall Street's volatile stretch continued on Wednesday, with stocks snapping back from four days of losses as oil prices slid.</p> <p>The S&P 500 rose about 2.6 percent, after having dropped nearly 5 percent over the previous four trading sessions. European markets also rallied, with the Stoxx Europe 600 climbing 4.7 percent.</p> <p>The gains came as oil prices retreated from their recent highs. Brent crude, the international standard, fell about 12 percent to \$111.14 a barrel on Wednesday.</p> <p>The volatility in financial markets has come as Russia's assault on Ukraine intensifies, and sanctions have deepened its economic isolation from the rest of the world. On Tuesday, oil prices surged and stocks slid as the Biden administration announced a ban on Russian oil imports and natural gas to the United States. Leaders in Britain and Europe have also said they will phase out imports of fuel from Russia.</p> <p>The drop on Wednesday came as concerns about a lack of supply eased. Reuters reported that the head of the International Energy Agency said it could release more oil from its reserves, and later in the day the ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the United States said that the oil producer favored increasing production and would encourage other oil producers to do so as well.</p>

	<p>Several companies, including McDonald's, Starbucks and Coca-Cola, have also taken measures to penalize Russia, announcing on Tuesday that they would temporarily halt sales in the country. Shell, Europe's largest oil company, also said on Tuesday that it would stop new purchases of Russian oil crude.</p> <p>Russia's currency continued to plummet on Wednesday. The Russian central bank issued an order on Wednesday to further curb access to U.S. dollars, restricting owners of foreign-currency accounts in Russian banks to withdraw only up to \$10,000 in dollars.</p> <p>Gas prices in the United States continued to climb to new highs. The average price of a gallon of regular gasoline reached \$4.252 on Wednesday, according to AAA.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Commuter study: transit remains in trouble
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/travel/commuter-study-indicates-pandemic-patterns-wont-change-quickly/281-f05b53d8-5a50-4511-b946-d583ee5b2cf2
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — In many ways, it feels like pre-pandemic commutes are back.</p> <p>Though the peaks have pretty much returned to normal, the commutes don't last as long in the Seattle metro area. But between commutes? There's actually more traffic.</p> <p>Those were some of the findings in an ongoing study of commute patterns. It's a study that began in 2021 when we first thought the pandemic might be over, after Washingtonians were told they could drop masks in May, and before the onslaught of the delta variant.</p> <p>Now, work by Doctor Jeff Ban continues as the omicron wave recedes.</p> <p>"For some length of time," Dr. Ban said when asked if traffic will remain down somewhat.</p> <p>When it comes to transit, he said that's likely to remain in real trouble.</p> <p>The work is carried out by the University of Washington's Mobility Innovation Center in partnership with King County Metro, the Puget Sound Regional Council, and support from Challenge Seattle.</p> <p>Much of the data was gleaned in rider surveys from Metro and Community Transit of Snohomish County. Needless to say, much of this commute study focuses on transit's struggles as passengers have sought to avoid potential exposure on busses and trains.</p> <p>The wildcard in all of this those who work from home.</p> <p>The study outlines four scenarios. The most optimistic is that transit riders would rebound to 2018 levels and 30% of commuters would work from home. On the pessimistic side, 25% of transit riders would commute to work, but switch to driving alone, and 50% of one-time commuters would continue to work from home.</p> <p>The neutral scenario has 15% of transit riders driving alone in their cars and 40% of workers teleworking from home.</p> <p>While working from home certainly feels like the new normal, it was two years ago this month when the COVID-19 pandemic had most of us packing up our offices.</p> <p>Dr. Ban's not sure working from home or hybrid-work splitting time between a few days at home and a few days at the office will ultimately stick.</p>

	"I don't know if the businesses would really like to continue this forever, or it's a short-term solution," he said, adding it could be five to 10 years before we get back to a commuting normal.
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HEADLINE	03/09 Repeated police misconduct: \$1.5B cost
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2022/police-misconduct-repeated-settlements/?itid=hp-top-table-main
GIST	<p>About 8:30 one Thursday evening in Detroit, Tony Murray was getting ready for bed ahead of his 6 a.m. shift at a potato chip factory. As he turned off the final light in the living room, he glanced out of his window and saw a half-dozen uniformed police officers with guns drawn approach his home.</p> <p>As the officers banged on the door, Murray ordered Keno, his black Labrador retriever, to the basement. As Murray let the officers in, one quickly pushed him to the floor and at least two others ran to the cellar, he said. "Don't kill my dog. He won't bite you," Murray pleaded. The sound of gunshots filled the house. Keno's barking, the 56-year-old recalled, morphed into the sound of "a girl screaming."</p> <p>Officers searched Murray's home for nearly an hour, flipping his sofa and emptying drawers. Outside, Murray approached the officers standing by their vehicles. One handed him a copy of the search warrant, which stated they were looking for illegal drugs. Murray noticed something else: The address listed wasn't his. It was his neighbor's.</p> <p>Months after the 2014 raid, Murray, who was not charged with any crimes, sued Detroit police for gross negligence and civil rights violations, naming Officer Lynn Christopher Moore, who filled out the search warrant, and the other five officers who raided his home. The city eventually paid Murray \$87,500 to settle his claim, but admitted no error by police.</p> <p>That settlement was not the first or last time that Detroit would resolve allegations against Moore with a check: Between 2010 and 2020, the city settled 10 claims involving Moore's police work, paying more than \$665,000 to individuals who alleged the officer used excessive force, made an illegal arrest or wrongfully searched a home.</p> <p>Moore is among the more than 7,600 officers — from Portland, Ore., to Milwaukee to Baltimore — whose alleged misconduct has more than once led to payouts to resolve lawsuits and claims of wrongdoing, according to a Washington Post investigation. The Post collected data on nearly 40,000 payments at 25 of the nation's largest police and sheriff's departments within the past decade, documenting more than \$3.2 billion spent to settle claims.</p> <p>The investigation for the first time identifies the officers behind the payments. Data were assembled from public records filed with the financial and police departments in each city or county and excluded payments less than \$1,000. Court records were gathered for the claims that led to federal or local lawsuits. The total amounts further confirm the broad costs associated with police misconduct, as reported last year by FiveThirtyEight and the Marshall Project.</p> <p>The Post found that more than 1,200 officers in the departments surveyed had been the subject of at least five payments. More than 200 had 10 or more.</p> <p>The repetition is the hidden cost of alleged misconduct: Officers whose conduct was at issue in more than one payment accounted for more than \$1.5 billion, or nearly half of the money spent by the departments to resolve allegations, The Post found. In some cities, officers repeatedly named in misconduct claims accounted for an even larger share. For example, in Chicago, officers who were subject to more than one paid claim accounted for more than \$380 million of the nearly \$528 million in payments.</p> <p>The Post analysis found that the typical payout for cases involving officers with multiple claims — ranging from illegal search and seizure to use of excessive force — was \$10,000 higher than those involving other officers.</p>

Despite the repetition and cost, few cities or counties track claims by the names of the officers involved — meaning that officials may be unaware of officers whose alleged misconduct is repeatedly costing taxpayers. In 2020, the 25 departments employed 103,000 officers combined, records show.

“Transparency is what needs to be in place,” said Frank Straub, director of the National Police Foundation’s Center for Mass Violence Response Studies, adding that his organization has called for departments nationwide to publicize cases with settlements. “When you have officers who have repeated allegations ... it calls for extremely close examination of both the individual cases and the totality of the cases to figure out what’s driving this behavior and these reactions and to see if there is a pattern in an officer’s behavior that triggers these cases.”

Defenders of police have a different view.

City officials and attorneys representing the police departments said settling claims is often more cost-efficient than fighting them in court. And settlements rarely involve an admission or finding of wrongdoing. Because of this there is no reason to hold officers accountable for them, said Jim Pasco, executive director of the National Fraternal Order of Police, the nation’s largest police labor union with more than 364,000 members.

“If there’s never been a finding of guilt or anyone’s fault, why put that in an officer’s record?” Pasco said. “That would be such a glaring omission of due process where in the legal system in the United States, a person is innocent until proven guilty.”

The Post reached out to scores of officers named in claims that led to payments. Some were no longer working for the departments. Most had no comment or, like Moore, did not return phone calls.

Two officers in Boston who had the highest number of claims settled have since retired. But both said the allegations — ranging from excessive force to wrongful arrest — did not accurately portray their work while on the force.

Paul Murphy, who was named in four lawsuits totaling about \$5.2 million in payments, said he “tried to do the best he could” as an officer. But he added, “sometimes things happened.” He declined to elaborate.

Gerald Cofield was named in three lawsuits that totaled about \$306,000 in payments. Cofield said he wished the city had fought the claims instead of settling because he believed city attorneys would have won, and his name and reputation would have been cleared. “We are not the bad guys these lawsuits paint us to be,” he said.

One Detroit officer said he wished the city had fought the lawsuits because he believed the cases had no credibility and those making the allegations had been armed or resisting arrest. “It’s called the Detroit lottery,” said the officer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he had not received permission to speak publicly. “People have been convicted and are in prison filing lawsuits knowing they can get paid.”

Multimillion-dollar settlements regarding allegations of police misconduct often generate headlines. Minneapolis paid \$27 million to the family of George Floyd, and Louisville paid \$12 million to Breonna Taylor’s family.

Those cases are the exception: The median amount of the payments tracked by The Post was \$17,500, and most cases were resolved with little or no publicity.

Many of the officers who had the highest number of claims against them were participating in task forces targeting gangs, drugs or guns, records show.

Pasco said he is not surprised that these officers would be the subject of multiple lawsuits, given the assignments. And given, he said, that the nation has become a “litigious society.”

“It’s the cost of policing,” he said. “That’s the reason crime, until recently, has declined.”

New York, Chicago and Los Angeles alone accounted for the bulk of the overall payments documented by The Post — more than \$2.5 billion. In New York, more than 5,000 officers were named in two or more claims, accounting for 45 percent of the money the city spent on misconduct cases. In New York, four attorneys who have secured the highest number of payments for clients separately said the high rate of claims is because of poor training, questionable arrests and a legal department overwhelmed by lawsuits.

In Philadelphia, six officers in a narcotics unit generated 173 lawsuits, costing a total of \$6.5 million. In 2014, those officers were federally charged with theft, wrongful arrest and other crimes but eventually acquitted at trial. Some 50 additional lawsuits are pending, many alleging misconduct dating back more than a decade, said Andrew Richman, a spokesman for the city’s legal department.

In Palm Beach County, Fla., officials paid out \$25.6 million in the past decade: One-third of that was generated by 54 deputies who were the subject of repeated claims.

The data provided by cities included no demographic information about the people who filed the claims. But Chicago attorney Mark Parts, who has handled scores of lawsuits against police, said most of his clients have been Black or Hispanic.

“The folks who are aggressively policed and confronted by officers in the course of their daily lives are people of color,” Parts said. “I have found the majority of those whose rights are repeatedly violated are African Americans and Hispanics.”

In the D.C. region, more than 100 officers have been named in multiple claims that led to payments.

In Prince George’s County, Md., 47 officers had their conduct challenged more than once, resulting in at least two payments each accounting for \$7.1 million out of \$54 million paid within the decade. Two in five payments involved an officer named in more than one claim. The totals are skewed by a \$20 million payment to the family of 43-year-old William Green, who was fatally shot while his hands were cuffed behind his back in the front seat of a police cruiser.

Cpl. Clarence Black was the subject of four settled cases, the most in the department. In 2010, the county paid \$125,000 to a husband and wife who alleged Black assaulted them. In 2013, a Temple Hills family received \$60,000 after alleging Black and four other officers illegally entered their home. In 2014, a woman got \$10,000 after alleging Black punched her shoulder. And in 2019, a man collected \$190,000 after alleging that Black illegally handcuffed him as he retrieved a bottle of water.

Black, a former officer of the year who joined the force in 2002, was indicted in August on two counts of second-degree assault and two counts of misconduct in office after being accused of assaulting a driver during a traffic stop in Temple Hills. Black’s attorney did not return calls requesting comment. He has pleaded not guilty and is scheduled to go to trial in July.

In the District, 65 officers have been named in repeated claims, accounting for \$7.6 million of the more than \$90 million in claims paid — the fifth-highest overall of the 25 cities surveyed. That total includes \$54 million paid on four claims involving officers who were named in no other cases.

Officer Fredrick Onoja was the subject of five cases that led to payments from 2014 to 2019 totaling \$116,000, the most of any officer on the force. Five Black men separately sued Onoja accusing him of wrongful arrests and harassment. They alleged that the 44-year-old Onoja — who has been on the force since 2011 — fabricated evidence against them in the 5th District neighborhood he patrolled.

Dustin Sternbeck, a D.C. police spokesperson, said Onoja had been “disciplined” for his actions, but declined to elaborate. Onoja, through the department, declined to comment. In a statement, Sternbeck said the department investigates allegations against officers made in lawsuits. “If the investigation sustains

misconduct, the department takes appropriate action, ranging from retraining to termination, depending on the nature of the misconduct sustained,” he wrote.

In Fairfax, the county settled seven cases, totaling \$6.1 million. Two of the cases involved five officers and led to \$5 million in payments. Only one officer was named in more than one claim.

Officer Hyun Chang, who has been with the department since 2010, was the subject of a claim that resulted in a \$750,000 settlement in 2018 with the family of a 45-year-old autistic man who died in 2016 as he was subdued by Chang and another officer. According to police, the victim, Paul A. Gianelos, of -Annandale, Va., became combative as the officers tried to return Gianelos to his caretakers. A Virginia medical examiner determined Gianelos died as a result of a heart attack related to the restraint.

In 2014, Chang was one of a dozen officers named in a \$190,000 settlement after a Hispanic woman charged the officers with excessive force, false arrest, unreasonable search of her home and racial profiling. He did not return requests for comment through a Fairfax police spokesperson.

In general, the government officials in many of the cities who were interviewed said the decisions to settle claims are made on a case-by-case basis.

In Chicago, officials “evaluate cases for potential risk and liability, and to take appropriate steps to minimize financial exposure to the city,” said Kristen Cabanban, spokesperson for the city’s Law Department.

It is often cheaper to settle a case than pay attorneys’ fees “that in many cases dwarf the actual damages award,” said Casper Hill, a spokesman for the city of Minneapolis.

Even when payments are covered by insurance claims, taxpayers ultimately still pay as those claims drive up the cost of the insurance.

The Post found that few cities publicize their payments or make it easy for the public to identify the officers involved. Of the 25 cities surveyed, four reported tracking payment information. The others declined to answer or said they were unaware of any city department that did such tracking.

Minneapolis, Palm Beach County, Fairfax County and Detroit were among the few places that recorded payments by officers’ names in the records provided to The Post. Portland organized cases by the officers’ badge numbers.

Most cities reported payments by the name of the person who filed the claim or, if the case led to a lawsuit, the number assigned in court. The Post identified the officers involved in tens of thousands of cases by reviewing individual claim summaries and court records.

There are disincentives to such tracking, legal and policing experts said.

“If an officer has multiple lawsuits, then the city is in jeopardy of negligent retention,” says Stephen Downing, a retired deputy chief with the Los Angeles Police Department and current adviser with the Law Enforcement Action Partnership, a criminal justice reform group. “Few cities want to risk retaining that information to avoid being part of an even more costly lawsuit.”

Policing experts also noted that prosecutors rely on officers to testify in criminal cases; settlement tracking could be used by defense attorneys to challenge an officer’s credibility.

The \$10,000 air freshener

In Portland, Officer Charles B. Asheim, 40, was the subject of three payments costing the city \$40,001. The city spent more than \$90,000 in legal fees fighting those three claims and \$250,000 defending three other claims involving Asheim that resulted in no payments, according to Heather Hafer, a spokeswoman with the city’s Office of Management and Finance.

In 2014, Marqueeta Clark and her then-boyfriend, Jahmarciay Barr, were leaving Barr's aunt's house on their way to the movies in Barr's blue 1991 Chevrolet Caprice. At the time, Clark was a 19-year-old early-childhood education major at Western Oregon University, and Barr was a 20-year-old community college student and UPS employee.

As the couple drove along the highway, they saw a police cruiser heading in the opposite direction.

Seconds later, Clark said, they noticed the cruiser make a U-turn and begin to follow them. Barr stopped at a traffic light with the cruiser behind them. When the light turned green, as they pulled away, the cruiser's lights came on and police pulled them over.

Asheim, an officer with the gang unit, told the couple they were stopped because Barr had changed lanes without using his turn signal, Clark said. She said she disputed the claim, telling police she could hear the blinker's ticking.

Then Asheim, she said, one of three officers at the scene, told the couple that police had pulled over the car because there was a green, pine-tree air freshener dangling from the car's rearview mirror. The air freshener, Asheim told them, obstructed the driver's line of sight and created a driving hazard, she said.

Barr, still seated in the car, grew angry and refused to cooperate with Asheim when the officer asked for his driver's license and registration, she said.

Sitting in the passenger seat, Clark said she begged the officers to allow her to reach into the glove compartment to pull out Barr's documents. But Asheim refused and continued to argue with her boyfriend, she said. "In my head, I was thinking these gang task forces are going to treat us as gang members. ... I was terrified," she said.

Asheim then pulled Barr through the driver's side window and placed him in handcuffs, she said.

In his official report, Asheim gave a different account: He wrote that he and his colleagues unhooked the driver's seat belt, opened the door and forced Barr to stand up outside the vehicle. Asheim added that Barr accused police of stopping him because "he was Black." The officers, according to Asheim's report, "calmly and simply" explained the reason for the stop, but the boyfriend "continued screaming."

Asheim also noted that Barr was becoming more "threatening and unpredictable," and that he threatened to "kick our f---ing ass."

Clark denied that Barr threatened the officers. "I remember watching Asheim laughing at us. It was really humiliating, embarrassing and frustrating."

The officers searched the car and found nothing illegal, according to the police report.

Police arrested the couple. Clark was charged with interfering with a police officer and disorderly conduct. Barr, who could not be reached for comment, was charged with failure to carry and present his license, disobeying an officer and disorderly conduct. He pleaded guilty to failure to carry and present a license and was ordered to pay \$250 in fines. Prosecutors dismissed the other charges against him.

Clark chose to fight her charges. Eventually, the judge dismissed the case.

Still, Clark remained furious. She and Barr sued the city, alleging that the stop by Asheim — who is White — and his two colleagues was part of a pattern of racially discriminatory police tactics. "I really wanted people to know how the majority of the Black community was being treated by police," she said. "It was never about the money for me."

Growing up in Portland, Clark said being stopped by police and having guns drawn was “the norm for us.” She said that she and her boyfriend were stopped by police about a half-dozen times in a four-year period.

In 2017, the city agreed to settle their claims, eventually paying Clark and Barr \$5,000 each. Officials did not apologize or admit wrongdoing.

They were among the city’s 89 payments for alleged police misconduct during the past decade. Of the more than \$7.5 million spent, nearly half of it has involved officers named in more than one claim.

“What Asheim did, stopping people for having an air freshener hanging from the rearview mirror, was the practice of the gang enforcement team,” said Gregory Kafoury, Clark’s attorney. “These officers were driving around and obviously looking for Black faces.”

Kafoury said he has represented dozens of people in lawsuits against Portland officers, the majority of his clients people of color.

“Historically, officers who are sued are never penalized, even when the city has to pay large settlements or verdicts for their misconduct,” Kafoury said. “The officers who are the most brutal and the most dishonest tend to move up in the ranks because they are seen as trustworthy and they are admired for their physicality. And that culture gets strengthened as these types of bullies move up and control the culture of the police department.”

Sgt. Kevin Allen, a Portland police spokesman, denied Kafoury’s assertions. “Our promotions process is extremely competitive and thorough and includes a 360-review in most ranks, taking in the candidate’s discipline record, commendations, community engagement and more,” Allen said.

Asheim has been with the force for 13 years and is a detective, Allen confirmed. He declined to answer questions about Asheim or the cases that led to settlements. Allen said he forwarded The Post’s request for comment to Asheim, who has not responded.

‘I’ll never forget him’

Early one evening in March 2014, Gregory Williams, 34, was walking to buy cigarettes at a gas station on the west side of Chicago. A man rushed up behind him, hit him on the head with a gun and pushed him against a fence, Williams said. He thought he was being robbed.

The man, however, was a Chicago police officer in plain clothes.

An unmarked police car pulled up. Inside was Officer Armando Ugarte — who from 2010 through 2020 would be a subject of 16 payments totaling more than \$5 million for claims that included excessive force and wrongful arrests.

That night, Ugarte and two other officers told Williams, a father of two and student at Strayer University, that they were arresting him for distributing a controlled substance: heroin. They drove Williams to a precinct called Homan Square, a former Sears and Roebuck warehouse that police used as an interrogation site.

While he was handcuffed, Williams said, Ugarte and the other officers pressed him to identify heroin dealers. When he said he could not, he alleges that they grabbed him by his neck, put him in a chokehold, threw him to the floor and punched and kicked him.

“I’ll never forget him,” Williams said about Ugarte.

In the arrest report, Ugarte wrote he had purchased drugs from Williams as part of a “controlled buy” that night while working undercover. Williams was charged with two counts of felony manufacturing or delivering a controlled substance.

At the time, Williams had been on parole for less than a year following a conviction for heroin possession. He said he believes this is why the officers targeted him to be an informant or face a return to prison.

After a year in jail, Williams went to trial. In court, Ugarte and two other officers testified that they had purchased heroin from Williams. But there were no other witnesses or evidence, according to the lawsuit. The jury acquitted Williams.

While in jail, Williams lost his personal assistant job with the Chicago Department of Human Services and dropped out of Strayer University, where he was pursuing a degree in business administration. "They took all that away from me because I wouldn't work for them. I wouldn't be a snitch," he said.

In 2018, he filed a lawsuit in federal court alleging that Ugarte and the five other officers and their supervisor had violated his civil rights through unlawful search and seizure, excessive force and malicious prosecution. "I don't think they really understand how hard it is coming from that place, coming out of prison," he said.

After more than two years of hearings and lengthy court filings, the city settled the case in 2020 for \$85,000, but denied any wrongdoing.

In records provided to The Post, Chicago officials had not recorded Ugarte's name with Williams's settlement. The Post identified him as an officer involved in the case through Williams's attorney, the amount and date of the payment and court records.

Williams's attorney, Torrey L. Hamilton, said the case was the second one she had handled involving Ugarte. In 2017, the city paid \$88,500 to a man she represented who also alleged that Ugarte wrongfully arrested him and was part of a team of officers that fatally shot a dog in front of a 12-year-old child.

"This same team of officers was busting into people's homes and killing dogs. In front of kids," said Hamilton, who began her career as a prosecutor and now focuses on police misconduct and whistleblower cases. In the past five years, Hamilton said 95 percent of her clients who have sued Chicago police for excessive force or wrongful arrests have been Black or Hispanic.

"Why are they still working?" Williams asked. "There's no punishment. They can do what they want. There are no repercussions behind it."

The Post's analysis found Chicago had the highest rate of misconduct claims involving officers named in multiple cases. More than 70 percent of the city's roughly 1,500 payments over the decade involved at least one officer with repeated claims.

Ugarte, 47, was "relieved of police powers" in October and reassigned to the department's alternative response section, according to Anthony Spicuzza, a police spokesman. The division handles non-emergency calls. Spicuzza declined to answer questions about Ugarte's work or the payments involving him. Ugarte joined the force in 2005, according to the Citizens Police Data Project, a Chicago-based nonprofit that tracks information about officers, including use of force, complaints and awards.

Ugarte did not return a Post reporter's calls. Spicuzza did not respond to requests for a response from Ugarte. "Due to a pending investigation, we will not comment further," Spicuzza said.

Poor communication

In Detroit, after receiving questions from The Post about the repeated payments involving Officer Moore and the raid at Murray's home, police officials said they have begun to use the city's claims data to monitor which officers are repeatedly named in lawsuits, to determine if they need additional training or should be reassigned or removed from the force.

Christopher Graveline, director of the professional standards unit for Detroit police, said his department as of September is working closely with the city's legal department to identify officers with more than two lawsuits or claims and make sure they are "flagged" in the department's risk management system.

Since The Post started asking the city about its repeat officers in September, 13 officers have been "flagged" for being sued multiple times and have been subject to "risk assessments," according to a department spokesman.

"There wasn't a good communication between the city law and police department. We weren't being aware of settlements and potential judicial findings touching upon our officers," Graveline said.

Graveline, who oversees internal affairs, said the department was often unaware of findings in civil cases, including determinations that officers had withheld evidence.

From 2010 to 2020, Detroit made 491 payments on behalf of officers, totaling nearly \$48 million, records show. More than half were on behalf of officers with more than one claim.

In addition to the 10 payments on claims involving Moore in that time, The Post also documented three before 2010 and one in 2021. During Moore's 23 years on the force, Detroit paid 14 claims arising from his police work.

Moore was part of the city's narcotics unit, a division that conducts many search warrants, Graveline said.

Graveline declined to comment on Moore's lawsuits but acknowledged other officers in the unit were not named in as many lawsuits. "That's one of the reasons we are taking steps to actively identify officers with similar patterns with multiple lawsuits," he said.

During a deposition in the lawsuit following the search of Murray's home, Moore testified that he had always intended to raid that residence. He said the wrong address on the warrant was a typo.

Moore said an informant told him about drug dealing at Murray's home. Moore also noted in his report that police found two tiny bags of marijuana during their search, which Murray disputes.

In a separate report, one of Moore's colleagues wrote that he shot Murray's Labrador because the dog charged them and was "showing teeth and growling." Also in the report, the officer misidentified Murray's dog as a "grey pit bull."

"We are not just going into these houses killing people's dogs for no reason. That would be ridiculous and absurd," said Moore, who was in the house when his fellow officers killed Keno. "Unfortunately, I've killed quite a few dogs. I would say I've killed over 10, 15 animals in the course of my career."

In response to questions from Murray's attorney, Kenneth Finegood, Moore testified that while he was with the drug unit, he had been the subject of internal investigations "once or twice a month." Moore, 49, also said he had never been found guilty of the accusations, which he said happened "constantly" when he was in narcotics.

Personnel records obtained through a public records request show Moore joined the department in 1996 and has received seven awards or commendations.

The records also show that Moore was reprimanded for failing to fill out a use-of-force report during a 2010 arrest and was suspended for five days for "willful disobedience of rules or orders" during a 2015 police chase. An investigation determined that Moore failed to notify the dispatcher of the initial traffic stop and then failed to broadcast the speed of the vehicle being pursued. The suspension was later overturned in arbitration.

	<p>Moore left Detroit in 2019 and is now an officer at the nearby Oakland County Sheriff's Department, according to Detroit police and the sheriff's department. The sheriff's department did not answer follow-up questions.</p> <p>Since Moore's departure from Detroit, allegations about his conduct when he was an officer have continued to cost the city financially.</p> <p>Last year, Detroit officials settled a man's claim that Moore and three other officers tackled and injured him in 2016 as he stood on his front porch. Police said they were searching for a shooter who allegedly fit his description, according to the lawsuit. The city settled for \$150,000.</p> <p>Detroit reached a second settlement concerning Moore in 2020 when the city paid \$10,000 to resolve a claim by two men who alleged that Moore and other officers illegally handcuffed and searched them in 2016.</p> <p>During the encounter, Moore and his colleagues confiscated \$579 from one of the men, according to the complaint.</p> <p>Moore wrote he searched the man and found six Baggies of a "leaflike substance." Police arrested the man on drug-related charges and towed his friend's car.</p> <p>The car's owner had to pay \$350 to retrieve his vehicle from the impound lot, the suit alleged.</p> <p>In addition to the drug charge — which was later dropped — Moore gave the man a citation for loitering, a misdemeanor offense. Moore wrote the man was in a "known narcotics location."</p> <p>The man, according to the lawsuit, was standing in the driveway of his home.</p>
Return to Top	<p>Click on source link to Explore the data... The Post documented nearly 40,000 payments involving allegations of police misconduct in 25 departments, totaling over \$3 billion. Departments usually deny wrongdoing when resolving claims.</p>

HEADLINE	03/09 DOH: 1,434,783 cases, 12,133 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article259249100.html
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported 1,595 new COVID-19 cases Wednesday.</p> <p>As of Wednesday, the state's preliminary death tally was 12,133. That number is up by 57 since Monday.</p> <p>The confirmed death tally as of Feb. 20 was 11,948. The statewide case total from the illness caused by the coronavirus stood at 1,434,783 cases on Wednesday. The state reported 1,042 cases on Tuesday.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Seattle public schools lift mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/seattle-public-schools-to-lift-mask-mandate/
GIST	<p>Seattle Public Schools' announcement Wednesday that masks would be optional in classes and buses starting Monday was met with the threat of a walkout from students, while educators alleged the district was violating its contract with the teachers union.</p> <p>It was also shaping up to be a first test for interim Superintendent Brent Jones, who is expected to get the job permanently if his contract is approved by the school board in the coming weeks.</p> <p>"We condemn this move by Seattle Public Schools," said a statement from the Seattle Student Union, a group of student advocates. "We call on the superintendent and the school board to stop the removal of the mask mandate, or we will be forced to walk out of school for our own safety."</p>

Educators say the decision is a failure on Jones' part and a violation of the Seattle Education Association's memorandum of understanding with the district. Bargaining over the mask mandate was scheduled for Friday, said a statement from SEA President Jennifer Matter and Uti Hawkins, SEA's bargaining chair.

"The District cannot unilaterally ignore an agreed-upon MOU, and now is leaving educators scrambling with just days before lifting the mask mandate," Matter and Hawkins said. "Clearly, SPS misled us."

Seattle Schools is aware of union concerns, said Bev Redmond, assistant superintendent of public affairs. "We were in discussions with SEA leadership on this matter before this decision was made and they expressed understanding of this potential change and a willingness to work together to bargain the impacts of the district's decision," she said.

The switch to optional masking comes after Gov. Jay Inslee announced in February that mask mandates would be dropped at schools, child care facilities and most other businesses, although school districts could choose to require students and teachers to continue to wear masks after the mandate ends. Other Seattle-area school districts have also announced they are making masks optional starting Monday, including Lake Washington, Bellevue, Issaquah, Renton, Auburn, and Northshore.

Some Seattle educators are supportive of the district's move. Teaching and learning is easier without masks, especially when teaching students how to spell, said Amy West, a third grade teacher at Arbor Heights Elementary.

"I'm personally excited about it," she said. "I've been feeling the dopamine deficit because so many of the exchanges we have in school are nonverbal, so we smile frequently and students use other expressions rather than raising their hands."

Some of West's third-graders say masks give them security, she said, but others need to be constantly reminded to wear their masks correctly.

SPS psychologist Vaughan Amaré, who has a compromised immunity and works hands-on in close proximity with students, is concerned about the change. Amaré notes that there aren't substitutes for school psychologists, and if one gets sick the staff needs to figure out how to get the work done. And state and federal referral timelines must be met, Amaré said.

"Being out sick is not an excuse for getting any of those timelines extended," said Amaré, who works at Denny International Middle School.

Seattle parents also have reservations about dropping the mask mandate. The Seattle Council PTSA sent the board a letter on March 2 asking to keep mask requirements in schools.

"It's an understatement to say I'm disappointed," said Lauren Hipp, a parent of two Graham Hill Elementary students. "I have a kid under 5 at home and that's a safety concern for me and there's many who have vulnerable family members."

Even though the mandate is ending, the SPS statement says "continued masking by staff and students is strongly encouraged."

"While Public Health is no longer mandating masks, masking is an individual choice," Jones said in the statement. "We won't tolerate shaming or judging anyone in our schools for wearing a mask or not wearing a mask."

The district has to be ready to return to masking or other COVID-19 safety measures if community transmissions increase or an outbreak occurs in a classroom, school or district building, Jones said. That echoes the [new guidelines](#) issued by the state Department of Health this week, which called for a return

to masks if there are clusters or outbreaks of the disease in classrooms, or among groups of students, such as a sports team or choir class.

Still, students are upset the district is backpedaling on stronger safety protocols in schools, said Natalya McConnell, co-founder of the student union and sophomore at Franklin High School. In January, students held [a rally in front of district headquarters](#) asking for better-quality masks.

“Two months later, the district is already taking away COVID precautions that we fought for,” McConnell said. “Wearing a mask is not your personal choice, it affects everyone else around you. If the school district lifts the mask mandate, it means they are allowing our safety to be in jeopardy.”

The district notified the community about the change around lunchtime and it was all anybody could talk about, said Delano Cardova, co-founder of the student union and senior at Franklin.

“One of the biggest things I’m proud of is we think as a community and we have that South End mentality,” Cordova said. “We are not just a singular person — we are part of an entity. Our actions have repercussions on our community.”

Franklin sophomore Noelle Chan said the reactions from her peers were a mixed bag — some are happy it’s being lifted, but others are concerned. She said she will continue to wear her mask at school to protect people “who might not be vaccinated or be immune-compromised.”

The Seattle Council PTSA’s March 2 letter noted that vaccines aren’t available for children under 5, and some adults can’t receive the vaccine because of health complications.

“Distribution and accessibility of vaccinations continue to follow the systemic patterns of racism in the United States, making it such that people living in poverty, communities of color, and students furthest from educational justice have lower vaccination rates,” the letter said.

Seattle Schools said it informed its labor partners of the mask change, including SEA, but Matter said the district is going back on its commitment to provide trust, predictability, and clear, consistent communication to the community and educators.

“Making announcements without answers to common questions and without consultation with those having to implement changes erodes SPS’ credibility,” Matter and Hawkins said. “This type of chaos, confusion, and distrust directly leads to educator burnout and to educators leaving the District and the profession.”

The Seattle Student Union is calling the mask change a political tactic to keep elected officials in office and are demanding the district reinstate the mandate. “As students, we should not have to be in the situation where we have to beg the school to put in place common-sense solutions.”

The controversy makes for a rocky start between Jones, the interim superintendent, and the teachers union. Jones is the only candidate being considered for the district’s next superintendent and is [currently negotiating his contract](#) to become the district’s next permanent leader.

“He was lauded for the stability he created and his ability to work with labor and others, but today he failed,” Matter and Hawkins said. “SEA was making progress in our relationship but we now have serious concerns about his leadership. Sadly, our trust has been shaken and we have gone backward. This does not bode well for future negotiations.”

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HEADLINE	03/09 Seattle short-notice encampment removal
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/removal-at-seattle-city-hall-encampment-is-symbol-of-mayor-bruce-harrells-approach-activists-say/

GIST

Wayne Kirk woke up at 6:30 this morning and left the encampment across from City Hall where he's been staying for the last month and a half. When he came back at 7 a.m., he saw notices posted saying work crews would come at 8 a.m. to force everyone out of the camp and remove trash and belongings.

He went to sleep and awoke an hour later to shouting: Police and cleanup crews from Seattle Parks and Recreation had arrived. A spokesperson for the city said notices were actually posted at 6 a.m.

City employees removed two blocks' worth of tents and belongings Wednesday morning after those few hours' notice — an unusual practice for an encampment with so many people. The city usually provides at least 48 hours' notice. Over the last year, a long-term, unhurried approach had become more common — [and supported broadly by City Council members and business associations](#) — for larger encampments.

A spokesperson for Mayor Bruce Harrell said seven people were moved into shelters out of 16 total.

The clearing marked the end of a 2 ½ week standoff between the mayor and activists with the Stop the Sweeps campaign, who occupied the camp and stayed in shifts to keep homeless people from being moved.

It also comes as the city prepares to bring employees back into the office March 16 and downtown businesses set similar timelines. The increased focus on the commercial core of Seattle has come alongside plans to get people living downtown out of there.

“We appreciate the concerted effort of the city and county over the last several weeks to get chronically homeless people in downtown inside and connected to services,” the Downtown Seattle Association said in a statement. “As we work toward downtown’s recovery, it’s important to keep the busiest sidewalks in the city open and accessible to all.”

As Harrell has ramped up removals this year in a fulfillment of campaign promises to crack down on visible homeless encampments, Stop the Sweeps activists have shown up to help people move their tents and belongings.

Harrell won the election last year by a commanding margin with a promise to take decisive action to open thousands of new units of shelter and get rid of the encampments accumulating around the city.

But to the protesters, who angrily watched from behind police tape as the camp they'd tried to protect was removed Wednesday, the removal is a symbol that Harrell cares more about optics — particularly outside his office window — than helping people.

It is unclear whether activists will continue to stage long-term protests at large encampments as removals become more common.

The protest, the suddenness of the City Hall action, as well as the [presence of police officers and a garbage truck](#), call back to a more contentious pre-pandemic [approach to entrenched homeless camps](#).

“The site has been on the list for resolution for weeks,” Harrell’s spokesperson wrote in an email, but also said that per the city’s rules for removals, “tents, other structures and personal property left in the right of way are subject to immediate removal if they create an obstruction or present public health or safety risks that prevent pedestrians and vehicles from safely using the sidewalk or other rights of way,” so the speedy notice was justified.

The removal was originally scheduled for Feb. 20 and notice was posted roughly 48 hours in advance, but when protesters showed up that morning, they decided to occupy the camp with the homeless residents and refuse to leave, one of the organizers, Jay Jones, said.

“We had talked with a few residents ahead of time who’d said, ‘I’m just not going to move,’ ” Jones said.

When that kept city employees from clearing the encampment, the activists started staying in shifts — for the first few nights, a few camped there, and then from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m., Jones said.

Knowing they couldn't hold it forever, the activists also tried to work with campers to get them into housing through their own channels. Jones said the activists got "more than five but less than 10" campers into housing in the last two weeks, and stressed that this removal is interrupting that work.

Kirk, who has a room at a low-income housing program but won't stay there because it doesn't allow his wife to stay with him, said the volunteers were helping him get a marriage license.

But the activists grew weary as the weeks drew on and they were spread thin by doing the same at other removals downtown. This week, they stayed only between 8 a.m. and noon. When they showed up Wednesday morning, police had beat them to the encampment.

Harrell has consistently talked about compassion and political unity, and his lieutenants have overseen a return to the status quo of speedy camp removals that homeless advocates decried.

The day before the removal, Harrell said in a press conference that the city was "not trying to strong-arm our way back to safety."

"I want the city clean. I want it safe," Harrell said. "I'm in here for the long game to rehabilitate Seattle. I'm here for the long game, and you don't emphasize a strategy in the long game by creating chaos and anger in the city. This is one Seattle, and I ask those with perhaps intolerance of what you see, bear with me."

But most voting Seattleites likely agree with Harrell's approach. He beat challenger M. Lorena González, who agreed with calls to "stop the sweeps," by [one of the largest margins in a mayoral race since 1997](#).

City Councilmember Andrew Lewis, who chairs the council's homelessness committee, disagreed with Harrell's use of police and the quick timeline of the removal, but said he is having productive conversations with the mayor's office about opening more shelters soon and isn't "yet" worried about the mayor's direction.

"A sidewalk is not an appropriate place for someone to live, but people do need a place to go," Lewis said. "I think everyone was offered shelter but it begs the age-old question of the suitability of shelter."

Data from the county's homeless management information system shows that more people leave shelters to go back to the streets or untracked destinations than to get into housing.

Councilmember Tammy Morales was more skeptical of the mayor's move Wednesday, saying on Twitter that "sweeps are traumatic events that only accomplish pushing people from one street to another."

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HEADLINE	03/09 WA group against requiring vaccine K-12
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/wa-advisory-group-recommends-against-adding-covid-vaccine-to-school-required-immunizations/
GIST	<p>A state advisory group has decided against recommending a COVID-19 vaccine requirement for students in K-12 schools, leaving one more step before a final decision is made on the matter next month.</p> <p>The question of whether Washington students should be required to get a COVID vaccine has divided many school communities over the past year, with some citing a desire to make schools safer and others concerned about a lack of reliable vaccine data for younger kids.</p> <p>The state Board of Health began the process of tackling the issue last fall, creating a separate technical advisory group tasked with researching whether a COVID vaccine would meet all the scientific criteria</p>

needed to be added to the list of required K-12 immunizations. The [volunteer group](#) was made up of doctors, public health officers, state and local education leaders, and community organizers.

The group has met several times since then and late last month finally [came to a vote](#).

Members were split, with six in favor of a COVID vaccine requirement in schools, seven against and four unsure — meaning the group will recommend against adding the COVID vaccine to the state’s administrative code when it presents its findings to the board next month.

“We need to keep our eye on the long term of what we’re trying to accomplish, and I think that’s community health overall,” Greg Lynch, a member of the advisory group and superintendent of the Olympic Educational Service District 114, said during the Feb. 24 meeting. “... We can’t afford right now to create a movement where the call is ‘Go fast now,’ without having a complete picture (of long-term data), which I worry about.”

Others also expressed concerns about a lack of vaccine data for school-aged kids and potentially unpredictable social impacts that a mandate could cause.

“As a clinician, I’m used to uncertainty,” said Dr. Ben Wilfond, another group member and a pulmonologist at Seattle Children’s. “I actually think the data with regards to COVID is more than sufficient for me to recommend this for anybody enthusiastically.

“But for those who are not ready to be there themselves and the implications of having this as a school requirement, all the things that come with that far outweigh the value of incremental change in (community) vaccination that might happen ... if we had this requirement.”

Members who supported a COVID vaccine requirement believed the group had an opportunity to help eradicate the virus and further protect school-aged kids.

“Are we going to put a stop to COVID?” Bill Kallappa, a member of the state Board of Education, said during the recent meeting. “Or are we going to allow it to trickle on and continue to cripple us in ways that we don’t know? We talked about unintended consequences, and that’s a valid point people bring up. But what are the unintended consequences if we do not respond?”

Some of the board’s recent vaccine discussions have been the subject of rampant misinformation spread online by anti-vaccine and -mandate activists and Republican congressional candidates.

In January, protesters gathered [at the state Department of Health headquarters](#) in Olympia, with many agitated by false claims that the board was set to adopt a rule allowing police to lock up COVID vaccine refusers in internment camps.

Board members and staff were deluged with messages — including some threats, according to a spokesperson. As a result, the board removed staff contact information from its website and flagged some messages for possible referral to law enforcement.

“The misinformation and disinformation is not doing anyone any favors,” Board of Health chair Keith Grellner said in a recent interview. He said the board has spent a good deal of time and resources trying to get accurate information to the public.

That furor has died down more recently, Grellner said, stressing that the board values public comments on policies it is actually weighing — like the possible school vaccination requirements.

“When they are constructive concerns it helps us do our jobs better,” he said.

During the technical group’s research period on school vaccinations, members analyzed nine criteria that address vaccine effectiveness, disease burden and implementation, meaning the group investigated

COVID shots' efficacy and affordability, the morbidity of the disease, and the reality of delivering and tracking shots.

According to the [state's administrative code](#) that requires immunizations for entry to schools or day cares, students are required to be vaccinated against, or show proof of acquired immunity for, chickenpox, measles, mumps, rubella, polio, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B and a few other diseases.

Students with medical, religious, philosophical or personal exemptions are excluded from the requirement.

"This is more difficult than just adding up the scores for the nine criteria," state science officer Dr. Tao Kwan-Gett, who co-chaired the advisory group, told members before the vote. "... It's more than an arithmetic problem, so I think the discussion here is very important."

The board is expected to make a decision on next steps at its regularly scheduled meeting April 13, Grellner said. If the board votes to agree with the advisory group's recommendation, the matter will wrap up for the time being.

If the board votes to overrule the advisory group's recommendation, a "public process" will begin to amend the state's administrative code to add the COVID vaccine to the list of required shots. The board has not acted against its advisory group's recommendation in at least the past decade, Grellner noted.

"I think it's really important for us to follow through on the (technical advisory group's) hard work," he said. "They went to great lengths to go through this information and give us a recommendation pretty quickly, so I think we owe it to them and to the public to make a decision as soon as we can so that this issue is, at least for the moment, wrapped up one way or the other."

Some education advocates, including the Seattle School Board, have come out in favor of a mandate for school COVID vaccinations, while Gov. Jay Inslee has expressed doubts, saying recently he worries such a move would prompt many parents to pull their children out of schools.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration last summer [approved Pfizer's COVID vaccine for people 16 and older](#), making it the first of three COVID shots available in the U.S. to be upgraded from an emergency use authorization, or EUA, to full approval.

For children aged 12 to 15, the vaccine can still be administered under an EUA, as can third doses for certain immunocompromised individuals. The Johnson & Johnson and Moderna COVID vaccines still await FDA approval but remain available for adults under an EUA.

Last month, [new data showed](#) Pfizer's pediatric COVID vaccine — for those ages 5 to 11 — was much less effective in preventing infection in younger kids than in older teenagers or adults, though it's still shown to prevent severe illness. The Pfizer vaccine is the only COVID shot authorized for that age group in the U.S.

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HEADLINE	03/09 Gonzaga, EWU delay lifting indoor masks
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/spring-break-prompts-gonzaga-ewu-to-delay-lifting-indoor-mask-requirements/
GIST	<p>While the state of Washington's indoor mask mandate is ending Saturday, some schools, including Gonzaga University and Eastern Washington University, are opting to keep their requirements in place later into the month due to the timing of spring break.</p> <p>Others like Washington State University, Whitworth University and the Community Colleges of Spokane are planning to follow the date set by Gov. Jay Inslee, who cited declining hospitalization and case rates in moving the date up from March 21, a date he initially set last month.</p>

Even after the mandate lifts, however, masks will be required in campus health care facilities and on public transit, as per state and federal requirements.

Spring break in focus

Spring break at Gonzaga started Monday and will continue through the rest of the week.

With that in mind, the university will delay lifting the school's indoor mask requirement until March 26.

Masks will be optional in most sites starting that Saturday. Faculty responsible for in-person classes or labs, however, will have the authority to require masks "without explanation," according to the university, with the expectation of advance notice if possible.

Gonzaga President Thayne McCulloh said while the university has followed certain regulations as required of higher education institutions, the school reserves the right as a private employer "to enact policies based on the specific needs of our own community."

"Gonzaga students, faculty, staff and contractors are advised to carry a mask at all times on campus in case it is needed to enter a specific location or space," McCulloh said in a statement. "The University will continue to make masks available in numerous locations as well."

As of Monday, EWU will require masks up until the end of the weeklong spring breaks for the university's semester and quarter programs.

Semester program spring break starts Monday, while the quarter break starts March 28. Accordingly, the mask mandate will lift for semester programs March 21, while the mask mandate for quarter program students will lift April 4.

EWU announced that plan when the statewide mask mandate was expected to end March 21.

With the date moved to this week, however, administrators are mulling whether to make a revision, EWU spokesperson Dave Meany said.

Ending this week

WSU, Whitworth, Spokane Community College (SCC) and Spokane Falls Community College (SFCC) are making face masks optional starting Saturday.

Since the start of the month, WSU hasn't required proof of vaccination for visitors attending campus events.

Cougar Health Services is providing vaccinations to WSU Pullman students as well as limited testing. The university also is encouraging faculty, staff, students and visitors to stay home if sick.

"Vaccination rates among the WSU community are strong," WSU President Kirk Schulz said in a statement, "and while we continue to monitor conditions within our communities, I am confident we are on the right track to bring the pandemic under control."

Whitworth University released an announcement Monday outlining the school's plans to make masks optional in most campus sites starting Saturday.

Exceptions will include health and counseling centers, the athletic training room and the Graves Gym COVID-19 testing area. Faculty, meanwhile, will have the option to require masks in classrooms or labs in cases of identified medical concern, according to the university.

The university is recommending masking for anyone with symptoms, a potential exposure or for those within 10 days of their COVID-19 diagnosis.

“Should we all meet in The Loop to throw out our masks? No, not yet,” President Scott McQuilkin said in a statement. “We have learned over the course of the pandemic that circumstances change, and when they change, we have to remain flexible and responsive to protect our campus.”

SCC and SFCC announced their mask guidance along with plans to host commencement for both schools in person June 17 at the Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena.

Graduates from the 2021 and 2020 graduating classes, who took part in virtual commencements due to pandemic restrictions, will be invited to walk across the stage during the class of 2022 commencement ceremony.

“We couldn’t be happier see everyone’s faces again,” SCC President Brockbank said in a statement. “This direction — backed by solid public health data and guidance — is a good indication that the worst of the pandemic is behind us.”

Masks will continue to be provided on campus, according to the colleges, as those who wish to continue wearing masks are encouraged to do so.

“We’ve had remarkable success in following health guidelines to keep people safe while providing students with an uninterrupted excellent education,” SFCC President Kimberlee Messina said in a statement.

“We look forward to everyone gathering together at our graduation celebrations to honor our students.”

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HEADLINE	03/10 US official: up to 6,000 Russians killed
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ukraine-russia-death-toll-invasion/
GIST	<p>Between 5,000 and 6,000 Russian troops may have been killed in just the first two weeks of the invasion of Ukraine, a U.S. official estimated Wednesday. The official stressed, however, that this is a difficult number to assess in real time, and the number could be closer to 3,500.</p> <p>Still, the official described the number as "very, very significant casualties," comparing the tally to losses from some World War II battles. The official did not give an estimate for the number of wounded Russians, but the figure in most wars is generally around three times as many killed, which would put that number at an estimated 15,000 to 18,000.</p> <p>Despite the estimated losses, Russian forces are still capable of encircling Kyiv within 1-2 weeks.</p> <p>Thousands of Ukrainian civilians and soldiers are also believed to have been killed over the past two weeks. The U.S. official said 2,000-4,000 Ukrainian troops have been killed. In the city of Mariupol — where an airstrike hit a maternity hospital on Wednesday — some 1,200 people have died over the course of Russia's nine-day siege of the city, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's office said, according to The Associated Press.</p> <p>The AP reported that the city council said Thursday the attack killed three people, including a child, and wounded 17.</p> <p>Russia on Thursday denied that it attacked the maternity hospital, calling the assertion "fake news," according to the Reuters news service. Russia's first deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, Dmitry Polyanskiy, tweeted that Moscow said Monday that the building had been taken over by Ukrainian troops, who were firing from it. "That's how fake news is born," Polyanskiy tweeted.</p> <p>The Mariupol maternity hospital is one of 18 hospitals and ambulances that have been attacked in Ukraine, the World Health Organization said Wednesday. Those attacks have resulted in at least 10 deaths and 16 injuries, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.</p>

"These attacks deprive all communities of health care," he said, adding that the "only real solution to the situation is peace."

But despite the strike on the hospital, cease-fires in a handful of major Ukrainian cities appeared to be largely holding Wednesday, allowing civilians to flee neighborhoods that have been pounded for days by Russian artillery. However, those still in the country are struggling to gain access to basic supplies, like water, food and medicine, and facing Russian airstrikes.

The U.S. and other Western nations have imposed harsh sanctions on Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russian oligarchs and Russian institutions in response to the invasion. But the Biden administration on Wednesday decided against helping [Poland send its MiG-29 fighter jets](#) to Ukraine. The U.S. feared that the move could be seen by Russia as escalatory, and did not want to risk sparking a larger war in Europe.

A U.S. official on Wednesday told CBS News that Ukraine does not currently need the MiGs, as its anti-aircraft defenses have been effective at keeping Russia from establishing air superiority. The U.S. will continue to send defensive assistance, like anti-tank weapons and air defense, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said during a press briefing Wednesday. Kirby also noted that Ukraine still has "several squadrons of fully missions capable aircraft."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki warned Wednesday that everyone should be "on the lookout" for Russia to possibly use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine. In a [statement](#), Psaki said the Biden administration is taking note of what she called Russia's false claims about biological weapons labs in Ukraine.

"This is all an obvious ploy by Russia to try to justify its further premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified attack on Ukraine," Psaki wrote.

The U.S. State Department also disputed Russia's claims, writing in a statement, "It is Russia that has active chemical and biological weapons programs and is in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and Biological Weapons Convention."

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HEADLINE	03/09 China fights spike w/selective approach
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/china-fights-covid-19-spike-selective-approach-83360202
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- China is tackling a COVID-19 spike with selective lockdowns and other measures that appear to slightly ease its draconian "zero tolerance" strategy.</p> <p>In Hong Kong, which recorded more than 58,000 new cases on Thursday, barber shops and hair salons were reopening. Many are seeing that as an example of mixed messages from the government of the semi-autonomous Chinese territory that has been ordered to follow the "zero tolerance" approach used on the mainland.</p> <p>The 402 cases of local transmission recorded on the mainland Thursday were quadruple the number of cases a week ago.</p> <p>Of those, 165 were in the northeastern province of Jilin, mainly in the cities of Changchun and Jilin, where city authorities locked down 160 residential communities where multiple cases have been detected.</p> <p>Three rounds of mass testing in Jilin city have also been completed, inter-city transport links suspended and all residents advised to stay home until numbers drop. Non-essential businesses and snow recreation areas were closed.</p> <p>Drivers and passengers of private cars, buses and taxis entering or exiting Changchun must present negative tests for the coronavirus taken within the past 48 hours.</p>

	<p>Authorities attributed the Jilin provincial outbreak to the highly contagious omicron variant, with more than 1,200 cases recorded nationwide since Friday, some of the highest numbers since the pandemic began spreading from the central city of Wuhan in 2020.</p> <p>Still, control measures were less strict than in the past, in a possible sign that China is beginning to relax its “zero tolerance” approach to the pandemic. As recently as January, China was locking down entire cities, affecting millions of people.</p> <p>In his annual report on the work of government delivered Saturday, Premier Li Keqiang said China needs to “constantly refine epidemic containment” but gave no direct indication Beijing was abandoning “zero tolerance.”</p> <p>Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said Wednesday that reducing deaths is the city’s priority, while a mass-testing plan was put on hold. It had been planned for this month, but Lam said there's now no set timing. To reduce deaths from the virus, Hong Kong is dedicating one hospital to COVID-19 treatment, converting general wards and building an emergency hospital that will be staffed by medical workers from the mainland.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 NKorea: spy satellites to monitor US
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nkorea-says-spy-satellite-monitor-actions-by-us-allies-2022-03-09/
GIST	<p>SEOUL, March 10 (Reuters) - North Korea will launch a number of reconnaissance satellites in coming years to provide real-time information on military actions by the United States and its allies, state media on Thursday reported leader Kim Jong Un as saying.</p> <p>While inspecting North Korea's National Aerospace Development Administration, Kim said "a lot" of military reconnaissance satellites would be put into sun-synchronous polar orbit in the period of a five-year plan announced last year, state news agency KCNA reported.</p> <p>"He noted that the purpose of developing and operating the military reconnaissance satellite is to provide the armed forces of the DPRK with real-time information on military actions against it by the aggression troops of the U.S. imperialism and its vassal forces in south Korea, Japan and the Pacific," the news agency said.</p> <p>North Korea appears to be preparing to launch a reconnaissance satellite, which could prove as controversial as the nuclear-armed country's weapons tests because they use the same banned ballistic missile technology, experts say.</p> <p>North Korea says it conducted two tests of satellite systems on Feb. 27 and March 5. Authorities in South Korea, Japan, and the United States says the tests involved launches of ballistic missiles.</p> <p>The launches drew international condemnation and the U.S. military said on Thursday it had increased surveillance and reconnaissance collection in the Yellow Sea.</p> <p>The United States also said it had heightened its ballistic missile defence readiness after a "significant increase" in North Korean missile tests.</p> <p>Kim defended the satellite work as not only about gathering information but protecting North Korea's sovereignty and national interests, exercising its legitimate rights to self-defence, and elevating national prestige, KCNA reported.</p>

"He stressed that this urgent project for perfecting the country's war preparedness capacity by improving our state's war deterrent is the supreme revolutionary task, a political and military priority task to which our Party and government attach the most importance," KCNA said.

The United States and its allies have condemned previous North Korean space launches as violations of U.N. Security Council resolutions that have imposed sanctions on North Korea over its nuclear and missile programmes.

'MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE'

North Korea has not tested a nuclear weapon or its long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) since 2017, but has suggested it could resume such tests because talks with the United States are stalled.

Its latest flurry of missile launches could be groundwork for a return to ICBM and nuclear bomb tests this year, the U.S. Directorate of National Intelligence (DNI) said in its annual Worldwide Threat Assessment released this week.

A satellite launched into orbit would be the first since 2016.

Recent sub-orbital launches, which likely used road-mobile medium-range ballistic missiles, appeared designed to "pop the key components of an imagery reconnaissance satellite up to operational altitudes for a few minutes of testing", 38 North, a U.S.-based monitoring group, said in a report.

Such components, including satellite stabilisation, the imaging payload, and data transmission may have failed in previous tests and therefore required additional testing, the group said.

"It remains to be seen how capable any North Korean imagery satellite would be, the frequency of launches, or how many such satellites might be maintained in orbit at any one time—all key indicators of the actual military significance of such satellites," 38 North said.

Regardless, North Korea clearly sees this capability as having propaganda value and showcasing its technological prowess and effective leadership, it added.

A launch could make technical contributions to North Korea's ICBM capability, depending on what type of rocket booster is used, 38 North said.

"It may also be the precursor to other more provocative developments mentioned by Kim, such as the testing of multiple-warhead missiles, solid-propellant ICBMs, and ICBM-range solid-propellant submarine-launched ballistic missiles," it said.

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HEADLINE	03/09 UK: Russia confirms use 'vacuum bombs'
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/world/russia-confirms-vaccum-bombs-thermobaric-ukraine-uk
GIST	<p>Russia has confirmed its use of a thermobaric weapon system, or "vacuum" bombs, during Putin's invasion of Ukraine, the UK Ministry of Defense said Wednesday.</p> <p>Vacuum bombs disperse explosive material over a large area that uses surrounding oxygen as fuel when it detonates, creating a blast wave that lasts far longer than conventional explosives. Thermobaric bombs are capable of sucking the air out of person's lungs, causing them to fill with liquid, or causing a person's lungs to rupture or explode.</p> <p>"The impact of the [TOS-1A] is devastating," the UK Ministry of Defense said in a video. "It can destroy infrastructure and cause significant damage to internal organs and flash burns, resulting in death to those exposed."</p>

House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#), D-Calif., said that she discussed Russia's use of vacuum bombs with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Wednesday.

"We talked about weapons that Putin is using, weapons prohibited in the Geneva Conventions, including cluster bombs and vacuum bombs, which caused severe suffering," Pelosi told reporters.

Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby, meanwhile, said Wednesday afternoon that he has seen "no indications" that Russia has used thermobaric weapons in Ukraine.

Oksana Markarova, Ukraine's ambassador to the United States, originally told reporters on Feb. 28 after meeting with Congress that Russian forces used a vacuum bomb.

"They should pay, they should pay a heavy price," she said at the time.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said on March 2 that Russia has [moved vacuum bombs](#) into Ukraine, accusing Putin of increasing "the brutality of its campaign against" the country.

"We have seen videos of Russian forces moving exceptionally lethal weaponry into Ukraine," she said in remarks at the UN. "That includes cluster munitions and vacuum bombs – which are banned under the Geneva Convention."

Human Rights Watch explains that vacuum bombs are "prone to indiscriminate use" due to their large blast radius.

"In urban settings it is very difficult to limit the effect of enhanced blast weapons to combatants, and the nature of enhanced blast weapons makes it virtually impossible for civilians to take shelter from their destructive effect," the organization said.

Vacuum bombs, or fuel-air explosives, were developed by the United States in the 1960s for use in Vietnam, according to the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation.

Russia used vacuum bombs in Chechnya in the 1990s and more recently during the Syrian civil war.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said last week that if Russia is using vacuum bombs, "it would potentially be a war crime."

International Criminal Court Prosecutor Karim Khan is investigating potential war crimes by Russia in Ukraine from 2013 to the ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	03/10 WHO: 18 attacks Ukraine medical facilities
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/maternity-hospital-18-ukraine-medical-centers-hit-83359361
GIST	<p>MARIUPOL, Ukraine -- An airstrike on a hospital in the port of Mariupol killed three people, including a child, the city council said Thursday, and Russian forces intensified their siege of Ukrainian cities, even as the top diplomats from both sides met for the first time since the war began.</p> <p>The attack a day earlier in the besieged southern city wounded 17 people, including women waiting to give birth, doctors and children buried in the rubble. Bombs also fell on two hospitals in another city west of the capital, Kyiv.</p> <p>The World Health Organization said it has confirmed 18 attacks on medical facilities since the Russian invasion began two weeks ago.</p>

As the war entered its third week, Western officials said Russian forces have made little progress on the ground in recent days, but they have intensified the bombardment of Mariupol and other cities, trapping hundreds of thousands of people, with food and water running short. Temporary cease-fires to allow evacuations have often faltered, with Ukraine accusing Russia of continuing their bombardments. But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said 35,000 people managed to get out on Wednesday from several besieged towns.

The Mariupol city council posted a video Thursday showing buses driving down a highway, with a note saying that a convoy bringing food and medicine was on the way despite several days of thwarted efforts to reach the city.

Images from the city, where hundreds have died and some victims have been buried in a mass grave, have drawn condemnation from around the world. Britain called the attack on a children's hospital a war crime. Two other hospitals were also hit in Zhytomyr, a city west of Kyiv, Mayor Serhii Sukhomlyn said on Facebook. He said there were no injuries.

"Everyone is working to get help to the people of Mariupol. And it will come," said Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko.

On the western edge of Kyiv, artillery fire could be heard Thursday, Deputy Interior Minister Vadym Denysenko said. He told Ukrainian TV channel Rada that residents had a "rather difficult" night on the outskirts of the capital in which Russian forces started by targeting military sites but then hit residential areas.

Meanwhile, the sides held their highest-level talks so far Thursday. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he hoped the meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba in a Turkish Mediterranean resort "will open the door to a permanent cease-fire."

Kuleba said the two sides discussed a 24-hour cease-fire but did not make progress. He said Russia was still seeking "a surrender from Ukraine."

"This is not what they are going to get," he said, adding that he was willing to continue the dialogue.

The ground shook more than a mile away when the series of blasts hit a children's and maternity hospital in Mariupol. Explosions blew out windows and ripped away much of the front of one building. Police and soldiers rushed to the scene to evacuate victims, carrying a bleeding woman with a swollen belly on a stretcher past burning and mangled cars.

Another woman wailed as she clutched her child. In the courtyard, a blast crater extended at least two stories deep.

"Today Russia committed a huge crime," said Volodymyr Nikulin, a top regional police official, standing in the ruins. "It is a war crime without any justification."

President Zelenskyy said the Mariupol strike trapped children and others under debris.

"A children's hospital. A maternity hospital," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address, switching to Russian to express horror at the strike. "What kind of country is this, the Russian Federation, which is afraid of hospitals, afraid of maternity hospitals, and destroys them?"

Sharing video that showed cheerfully painted hallways strewn with twisted metal, Zelenskyy urged the West to impose even tougher sanctions than the ones that have already plunged its economy into severe isolation, so Russia "no longer has any possibility to continue this genocide."

Britain's Armed Forces minister, James Heappey, said that whether hitting the hospital was "indiscriminate" fire into a built-up area or a deliberate targeting, "it is a war crime."

On Thursday, Britain added more oligarchs to its sanctions list, including Roman Abramovich, the billionaire Premier League soccer club Chelsea. The government said Abramovich's assets were frozen, he was banned from visiting the U.K. and barred from transactions with U.K. individuals and businesses.

Russia's military is struggling more than expected, but Putin's invading force of more than 150,000 troops retains possibly insurmountable advantages in firepower as it bears down on key cities.

Despite often heavy shelling on populated areas, American military officials reported little change on the ground over the previous 24 hours, other than Russian progress against the cities of Kharkiv and Mykolaiv, in heavy fighting. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to assess the military situation.

Authorities announced new cease-fires to allow thousands of civilians to escape bombarded towns. Zelenskyy said three humanitarian corridors operated on Wednesday, from Sumy in the northeast near the Russian border, from suburbs of Kyiv and from Enerhodar, the southern town where Russian forces took over a large nuclear plant.

In all, he said, about 35,000 people got out. More evacuations were planned for Thursday from towns and cities under bombardment in eastern and southern Ukraine — including Mariupol — as well as the Kyiv suburbs.

People streamed out of Kyiv's suburbs a day earlier, many headed for the city center, as explosions were heard in the capital and air raid sirens sounded repeatedly. From there, the evacuees planned to board trains bound for western Ukrainian regions not under attack.

Civilians leaving the Kyiv suburb of Irpin were forced to make their way across the slippery wooden planks of a makeshift bridge, because the Ukrainians blew up the concrete span leading to Kyiv days ago to slow the Russian advance.

With sporadic gunfire echoing behind them, firefighters dragged an elderly man to safety in a wheelbarrow, a child gripped the hand of a helping soldier, and a woman inched her way along, cradling a fluffy cat inside her winter coat. They trudged past a crashed van with the words "Our Ukraine" written in the dust coating its windows.

Previous attempts to establish safe evacuation corridors over the past few days largely failed because of what the Ukrainians said were Russian attacks. But Putin, in a telephone call with Germany's chancellor, accused militant Ukrainian nationalists of hampering the evacuations.

International Red Cross spokesman Jason Straziuso said safe passage corridors were welcome but have to be well planned, with details agreed on by all sides including the right to bring in food, clean water, medical supplies and other necessities.

Such guarantees are vital for places like Mariupol, a city of 430,000 on the Sea of Azov, where Zelenskyy's office said about 1,200 people have died during the nine-day siege.

Local authorities hurried to bury the dead from the past two weeks of fighting in a mass grave in the city. Workers dug a trench some 25 meters (yards) long at one of the city's old cemeteries and made the sign of the cross as they pushed in bodies wrapped in carpets or bags.

Nationwide, thousands are thought to have been killed, both civilians and soldiers, since Putin's forces invaded. The U.N. estimates more than 2 million people have fled the country, the biggest exodus of refugees in Europe since the end of World War II.

The fighting knocked out power to the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear plant on Wednesday, raising fears about the spent radioactive fuel stored there that must be kept cool. But the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency said it saw "no critical impact on safety" from the loss of power.

	<p>Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk pleaded Thursday with the Russian military to allow access for repair crews to restore electricity to the plant, and to fix a damaged gas pipeline in the south that has left Mariupol and other towns without heat for days.</p> <p>The crisis is deteriorating as Moscow's forces intensify their bombardment of cities in response to what appears to be stronger Ukrainian resistance and heavier Russian losses than anticipated.</p> <p>The Biden administration warned Russia might seek to use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine and rejected Russian claims of illegal chemical weapons development there.</p> <p>This week, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova — without evidence — accused Ukraine of running chemical and biological weapons labs with U.S. support. White House press secretary Jen Psaki called the claim “preposterous” and said Russia might be trying to lay the groundwork for its own use of such weapons against Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Europe ponders next country Russia target
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-europe-wonders-russian-target-83360468
GIST	<p>BELGRADE, Serbia -- For some European countries watching Russia's brutal war in Ukraine, there are fears that they could be next.</p> <p>Western officials say the most vulnerable could be those who aren't members of NATO or the European Union, and thus alone and unprotected — including Ukraine's neighbor Moldova and Russia's neighbor Georgia, both of them formerly part of the Soviet Union — along with the Balkan states of Bosnia and Kosovo.</p> <p>But analysts warn that even NATO members could be at risk, such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on Russia's doorstep, as well as Montenegro, either from Moscow's direct military intervention or attempts at political destabilization.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin "has said right from the start that this is not only about Ukraine," said Michal Baranowski, director of the German Marshall Fund's Warsaw office.</p> <p>"He told us what he wants to do when he was listing his demands, which included the change of the government in Kyiv, but he was also talking about the eastern flank of NATO and the rest of Eastern Europe," Baranowski told The Associated Press in an interview.</p> <p>As Ukraine puts up stiff resistance to the two-week-old Russian attack, Baranowski said "it's now not really clear how he'll carry out his other goals."</p> <p>But the Biden administration is acutely aware of deep concerns in Eastern and Central Europe that the war in Ukraine may be just a prelude to broader attacks on former Warsaw Pact members in trying to restore Moscow's regional dominance.</p> <p>EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has said that "Russia is not going to stop in Ukraine."</p> <p>"We are concerned for neighbors Moldova, Georgia, and the Western Balkans," he said. "We have to keep an eye on Western Balks, particularly Bosnia, which could face destabilization by Russia."</p> <p>A look at the regional situation:</p> <p>MOLDOVA</p>

Like its neighbor Ukraine, the ex-Soviet republic of Moldova has a separatist insurgency in its east in the disputed territory known as Trans-Dniester, where 1,500 Russian troops are stationed. Although Moldova is neutral militarily and has no plans to join NATO, it formally applied for EU membership when the Russian invasion began in a quick bid to bolster its ties with the West.

The country of 2.6 million people is one of the poorest countries in Europe, and it's hosting tens of thousands of Ukrainians who fled the war. The invasion has prompted heightened concerns in Moldova not only over the humanitarian crisis, but also because of fears that Putin might try to link the separatists east of the Dniester River with Ukraine via the latter's strategic port of Odesa.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Moldova last week and pledged: "We stand with Moldova and any other country that may be threatened in the same way."

Moldovan President Maia Sandu said there was no indication yet the Russian forces in Trans-Dniester had changed their posture, but stressed that the concern was there.

"In this region now there is no possibility for us to feel safe," Sandu said.

GEORGIA

War erupted between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 when Georgian government troops tried unsuccessfully to regain control over the Moscow-backed breakaway province of South Ossetia. Russia routed the Georgian military in five days of fighting and hundreds were killed. Afterward, Russia recognized South Ossetia and another separatist region, Abkhazia, as independent states and bolstered its military presence there.

The government of West-leaning Georgia condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but hasn't shown the same solidarity that Kyiv displayed during the Georgia-Russia war. Hundreds of Georgian volunteers were stopped by authorities from joining an international brigade fighting Russia in Ukraine.

Georgia's seemingly neutral stance has turned out thousands in nightly rallies in central Tbilisi in solidarity with Ukraine. Last week, Georgia's government applied for EU membership just days after declaring it wouldn't accelerate its application as fears of a Russian invasion grew.

THE BALTICS

Memories of Soviet rule are still fresh in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Since the invasion of Ukraine, NATO has moved quickly to boost its troop presence in its eastern flank allies, while Washington has pledged additional support.

To residents of the Baltic nations — particularly those old enough to have lived under Soviet control — the tensions prior to the Feb. 24 invasion recalled the mass deportations and oppression. The three countries were annexed by Josef Stalin during World War II and only regained their independence with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

They joined NATO in 2004, putting themselves under the military protection of the U.S. and its Western allies. They say it is imperative that NATO show resolve not just in words but with boots on the ground.

"Russia always measures the military might but also the will of countries to fight," said Janis Garisons, state secretary at Latvia's Defense Ministry. "Once they see a weakness, they will exploit that weakness."

Blinken, who visited Latvian capital Riga on Monday, said the Baltics have “formed a democratic wall that now stands against the tide of autocracy” that Russia is pushing in Europe.

THE BALKANS

It would be hard for Russian troops to reach the Balkans without engaging NATO forces stationed in all the neighboring countries. But Moscow could destabilize the region, as it already does, with the help of Serbia, its ally which it has been arming with tanks, sophisticated air defense systems and warplanes.

The Kremlin has always considered the region its sphere of influence although it was never part of the Soviet bloc. A devastating civil war in the 1990s left at least 120,000 dead and millions homeless. Serbia, the largest state in the Western Balkans, is generally blamed for starting the war by trying to prevent the breakup of Serb-led Yugoslavia with brutal force -- a move resembling Moscow's current effort to pull Ukraine back into its orbit by military force.

There are fears in the West that the pro-Moscow Serbian leadership, which has refused to join international sanctions against Russia, could try to use the attention focused on Ukraine to further destabilize its neighbors, particularly Bosnia, where minority Serbs have been threatening to split their territories from the joint federation to join Serbia. Serbian officials have repeatedly denied they are meddling in the neighboring states, but have given tacit support to the secessionist moves of the Bosnian Serbs and their leader, Milorad Dodik.

The Russian Embassy in Bosnian capital Sarajevo warned last year that should Bosnia take steps towards joining NATO, “our country will have to react to this hostile act.” Joining NATO will force Bosnia to take a side in the “military-political confrontation,” it said.

EU peacekeepers in Bosnia have announced the deployment of about 500 additional troops to the country, citing “the deterioration of the security internationally (which) has the potential to spread instability.”

Kosovo, which split from Serbia 1999 after a NATO air war against Serbian troops, has asked the U.S. to establish a permanent military base in the country and speed up its integration into NATO after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

“Accelerating Kosovo's membership in NATO and having a permanent base of American forces is an immediate need to guarantee peace, security and stability in the Western Balkans,” Kosovo Defense Minister Armend Mehaj said on Facebook.

Serbia said the move is unacceptable.

Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence is recognized by more than 100 countries, mainly Western nations, but not by Russia or Serbia.

Montenegro, a former ally that turned its back on Russia to join NATO in 2017, has imposed sanctions on Moscow over the war in Ukraine and is seen as next in line in the Western Balkans to join the EU. The country is divided between those favoring pro-Western policies and the pro-Serbian and pro-Russian camps, raising tensions.

Russia has repeatedly warned Montenegro's pro-Western President Milo Djukanovic, who led the small Adriatic state into NATO, that the move was illegitimate and without the consent of all Montenegrins.

Russia may hope to eventually improve its ties with Montenegro in a bid to strengthen its presence in the Mediterranean.

HEADLINE	03/09 Recall: BMW vehicles
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/bmw-recalls-vehicles-3rd-time-due-engine-fire-83338862
GIST	<p>DETROIT -- BMW is recalling more than 917,000 older cars and SUVs in the U.S. — most for a third time — to fix a problem that can cause engine compartment fires.</p> <p>The recall covers many 3 Series, 5 Series, 1 Series, X5, X3, and Z4 vehicles from the 2006 through 2013 model years.</p> <p>Documents posted Wednesday by the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration say there could be an electrical short in the positive crankcase ventilation valve heater. It can overheat and cause a fire.</p> <p>The fire risk occurs while the vehicles are being driven or soon after they are parked. BMW says the vehicles can still be driven and don't have to be parked outdoors because fires have been rare. The company wouldn't comment when asked if fires have spread to any buildings.</p> <p>BMW says in documents that if a driver smells smoke or burning plastic or sees smoke from the engine compartment, they should pull to a safe location, shut off the engine and leave the vehicle.</p> <p>The German automaker is still developing a fix. Jay Hanson, a BMW spokesman in the U.S., said in an e-mail that the remedy and a sufficient parts inventory are expected in mid-2022. Owners will be notified by letter starting April 25.</p> <p>Most of the cars were recalled in 2017 and 2019 for the same problem. BMW documents say owners who had the previous repairs done will need to get their vehicles fixed again.</p> <p>BMW says in documents that it has eight reports of fires, but no reports of any crashes or injuries caused by the problem.</p> <p>The company wouldn't say how many vehicles are being recalled outside of the U.S.</p> <p>Owners can go to https://www.nhtsa.gov/ and key in their 17-digit vehicle identification number to see if their autos are affected.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Minneapolis failed protocols Floyd unrest
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/report-minneapolis-follow-protocols-floyd-unrest-83339881
GIST	<p>MINNEAPOLIS -- A report on how Minneapolis police, fire and other agencies responded to protests that erupted following the killing of George Floyd paints a picture of miscommunication and a lack of planning.</p> <p>The report by the risk management firm Hillard Heintze describes a breakdown of critical communication among government agencies that left first responders with limited guidance.</p> <p>The report released Tuesday said Mayor Jacob Frey failed to implement the city's emergency protocols in response to the unrest that followed Floyd's death at the hands of police in May 2020.</p> <p>Minneapolis has an emergency operations plan that is “well written, comprehensive and consistent with nationally recognized practices,” but the mayor did not ensure that it was properly implemented, according to the report.</p> <p>Frey has asked city staff to create a plan for implementing the report's roughly two dozen recommendations, the mayor said in a statement. The report suggests a range of changes to improve communications among city employees, boost police training on crowd control tactics and upgrade employees' wellness programs, the Star Tribune reported.</p>

	<p>“Trainings are underway, new structures are being put in place,” Frey said, “and we are in routine contact with multi-jurisdictional partners to enhance communications and operational preparedness.”</p> <p>Derek Chauvin, a white officer who held his knee to Floyd's neck for 9 1/2 minutes as the Black man was handcuffed and face down on the street, was convicted last year of murder and manslaughter. Bystander video prompted unrest around the world after it was posted on social media.</p> <p>Three other officers were convicted last month of violating Floyd's rights by depriving him of medical care.</p> <p>The day after Floyd's death, police began using rubber bullets and “chemical irritants” on demonstrators. Poor communication and a frustration with the competency of command staff resulted in an uneven police response, researchers found.</p> <p>The report's researchers interviewed 90 government employees and community members, watched about 30 hours of body camera video and reviewed about 2,400 documents to reach their findings.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 International Space Station in crosshairs
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/us-russian-international-space-station-partnership-jeopardy-geopolitical/story?id=83343874
GIST	<p>For the past 24 years, the U.S. and Russia have worked together to construct and maintain the International Space Station, where research has led to some of the most important discoveries of the 21st century.</p> <p>Now, 227 miles below the unrivaled laboratory, Russia has waged a war in Ukraine that's pitted the country against the U.S. and its allies -- leaving the future of the ISS in question.</p> <p>"When you're in space and you're flying around the Earth at 17,500 miles an hour and in a very hazardous environment, cooperation is the most important thing," said former astronaut Scott Kelly.</p> <p>The ISS is divided into two sections: the Russian Orbital Segment operated by Russia and the United States Orbital Segment run by the U.S. American and Russian astronauts were the first to step inside the ISS in 1998.</p> <p>From there, the partnership has continued. When the U.S. shuttle program ended in 2011, U.S. astronauts like Cady Coleman relied exclusively on Russian rockets to get her on board the station.</p> <p>Coleman said once on board the craft, where you came from didn't matter, and it was all about how to work and live with one another.</p> <p>"Space is hard and space is dangerous. And in my experience ... with our Russian partners it means sitting down, having a meal together," said Coleman. "It means talking about what's hard for you, what's hard for them and how together we can get this accomplished. [We] look each other in the eye and realize that we're all about the same thing."</p> <p>Coleman said that American astronauts and Russian cosmonauts would cooperate on everything from life-or-death missions to the mundane.</p> <p>"I was up there with the three Russian cosmonauts," said Coleman. "[We] share a goal of exploring space ... and that goal doesn't change whether we're on the Earth or living up on the space station."</p> <p>NASA's reliance on Russian rockets ended in 2020 when SpaceX debuted its Crew Dragon Capsule, but talks are underway to allow Russians on future SpaceX flights.</p>

Russian cosmonauts continue to train at NASA's facility in Houston.

Astronaut Mark Vande Hei, who holds the ongoing record for longest space flight, is set to end his 355 days in space in just three weeks. The plan is for him to land in Kazakhstan with two Russian cosmonauts on a Russian spacecraft.

But unprecedented sanctions against Russia could put Vande Hei's return on hold. After Russia invaded Ukraine nearly two weeks ago, President Joe Biden announced new sanctions, including cutting more than half of Russia's high-tech imports.

"It'll degrade their aerospace industry, including their space program," Biden said during a White House address Feb. 24.

Shortly after the remarks, NASA released a statement on U.S.-Russian civil space cooperation, saying that "no changes are planned" and that the agency will continue to support "ongoing in orbit and ground station operations."

Dmitry Rogozin, the head of Russia's Space Agency and a close ally to Russian President Vladimir Putin, responded to Biden in a series of hostile tweets. On Feb. 26, he posted a video in Russian that threatened to leave Vande Hei behind in space and detach Russia's segment of the space station altogether.

Kelly said he felt compelled to speak up and engaged with Rogozin on Twitter.

"I was just enraged that he, the [cosmonauts], said that they were going to leave an American crew member behind. I never thought I would ever hear anything so outrageous," said Kelly.

NASA has remained silent on Rogozin's threats to abandon Vande Hei in space. Prior to the conflict in Ukraine, Russia had announced plans to pull out of the space station as early as 2025.

Although war continues to wage on Earth, Kelly said he hopes that the U.S.-Russian partnership in space can be mended.

"I've known [people at the Russian Space Agency], many of them for well over two decades, I trust them. I've literally trusted them with my life before," said Kelly, who added that the U.S. should still "prepare for the worst" and "hope for the best."

Kelly said the ISS is an example of where peace is possible because all astronauts share a common goal: to explore and learn.

"I just hope people realize and want to keep this partnership together because it is one of the few things that unites all of humanity together," said Kelly. "I think one of the biggest successes of the International Space Station is the international aspect of giving us something to work on together, that makes us friends."

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	03/09 Anonymous info-war: 5M text messages
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/more-than-5-million-anti-propaganda-text-messages-sent-to-russians-in-anonymous-information-warfare/
GIST	A digital army from around the globe laboring to counter Russia's disinformation ops has sent more than 5 million text messages to Russian cell phone numbers relaying information about what's really happening in Ukraine.

“We have a message for the citizens of the free world: the legion is calling you. Ukraine needs you. You are the largest army in the history of the world,” Squad303, which created the tool enabling digital warriors to reach past the Russian regime’s information wall, said in a video today. “You don’t need any weapons or ammunition. Your weapons are smartphone and your ammo is messages sent to Russian citizens.”

The hacking collective Anonymous launched the #OpRussia cyber offensive nearly two weeks ago in response to the Ukraine invasion, resulting in hacks and takedowns of Russian government websites along with leaks of seized data. Hackers have used their access to broadcast the truth about Putin’s war to the citizenry and call on Russians to oppose the attack on their neighbor.

Anonymous programmers Squad303 created a tool that allows non-hackers to make a positive contribution to “the largest and most successful cyber operation in the history of the world.” Within 48 hours of releasing the 1920.in tool, the group reported on Twitter that “the people of the free world sent the Russians 2 million text messages” warning that the people of Russia would suffer as a result of nations’ response to Vladimir Putin’s aggression and that they need to know the truth about his unprovoked war. By Tuesday, that volume had hit 5 million and still climbing.

The group also posted on its Telegram channel a list of Russian Duma members’ mobile phone numbers, encouraging the digital army to “have a nice chat” with the lawmakers.

Another Anonymous group said it seized control of more than 400 Russian camera feeds including government facilities, offices, schools and businesses, and posted some on a website with a message overlaying the feeds that includes the latest civilian death toll in Ukraine and begins with, “Putin is killing children.”

“This is anti-propaganda to open the eyes of Russian civilians,” the Anon account tweeted Monday. “We have already been working on our next camera dump which will contain cameras from Belarus and Ukraine, mostly combat zones which will be more useful for recon than these. This is strictly anti-propaganda for the Russian people.”

In a mission statement on their [behindenemylines.live](#) camera dump site, the Anonymous hackers noted, “If you are Russian, we just want you to know that you are being brainwashed by state propaganda, and the Kremlin and Putin are lying to you. Ukraine is not controlled by Nazis, they do not need you to ‘free’ them. You need to fight back and free yourself from your Dictator. We realize this is scary, and easier said than done, but you will have the entire world behind you, supporting you and watching you.”

A table tweeted by one Anonymous account estimated that as of March 3 about a third of prominent hacker groups were involved in “the largest cyber war ever right now,” with just 12 of the 49 groups siding with Russia, three whose support was unknown, and the rest supporting Ukraine.

NB65, a hacking group affiliated with Anonymous that earlier said it breached the control center of Roscosmos and cut off the agency’s control over its spy satellites as part of the ongoing cyber-offensive, promised Tuesday that a Kaspersky source code leak is forthcoming. “I’m sure you’ll find interesting relationships in this code,” the group tweeted. “Glory to Ukraine.”

In a message posted Sunday, NB65 declared that “we really enjoyed Kaspersky’s endpoint security, it’s a great foothold!”

More than 2,500 websites linked to the Russian and Belarusian governments along with state-run media, banks, hospitals, airports, and companies were hacked in the first week after the Anonymous collective declared that they launched cyber operations, a prominent Anonymous account reported last week. The antiwar hackers have also gone after pro-Russian hackers, swiping and leaking thousands of internal chats from the Conti ransomware group, as well as military communications and more.

Hackers announced Sunday that they had breached Russian streaming services Wink and Ivi and live broadcasts on TV stations Russia 24, Channel One, and Moscow 24 to broadcast war footage from Ukraine.

The hack included a text message on the screen calling on Russians to stand up against Putin's war: "We are ordinary citizens of Russia. We oppose the war on the territory of Ukraine. Russia and the Russians against the war! This war was waged by Putin's criminal, authoritarian regime on behalf of ordinary Russian citizens. Russians, oppose the genocide in Ukraine."

On Friday, state communications watchdog Roskomnadzor said it blocked Facebook and Twitter as the Putin regime has tried to stifle the free flow of information on social media. Putin also signed a bill that was jammed through by pro-Kremlin lawmakers to penalize with up to 15 years in prison those disseminating information about the war that doesn't fit the Kremlin's disinformation narrative. Russia is also requiring all servers and domains to be transferred to a Russian intranet by March 11.

On Tuesday, Twitter launched a Tor onion service domain to let users access the site through the dark web and get around the Russian government block.

Cybersecurity expert Alec Muffett, who assisted Twitter with the project, announced the launch on Twitter, noting the move will be "providing greater privacy, integrity, trust, & 'unblockability' for people all around the world."

"So why am I first(-ish?) to tweet about it?" Muffett added. "From past experience with the Facebook and BBC Onion sites, any sufficiently large announcement leads to a load-spike, and given that @TwitterSafety has 3.6 million followers it would not be wise in a time of global crisis."

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HEADLINE	03/09 Executive Order on digital assets
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/digital-assets-biden-executive-order-security/
GIST	<p>Citing the need for the U.S. government to address security issues with cryptocurrencies, as well as their role in the overall financial system, President Biden signed an executive order Wednesday on "responsible innovation" for digital assets.</p> <p>A fact sheet released Wednesday morning by the White House called it "the first ever, whole-of-government approach to addressing the risks and harnessing the potential benefits of digital assets and their underlying technology."</p> <p>The signed order lists seven areas of concern, including mitigating "illicit finance" and the related national security risks. The order also called out the lack of adequate of cybersecurity protections in the industry, leaving sensitive financial information at risk and already leading to billions in losses for consumers.</p> <p>"The United States should ensure that safeguards are in place and promote the responsible development of digital assets to protect consumers, investors, and businesses; maintain privacy; and shield against arbitrary or unlawful surveillance, which can contribute to human rights abuses," the order states.</p> <p>The executive also direct agencies "to work with our allies and partners to ensure international frameworks, capabilities, and partnerships are aligned and responsive to risks."</p> <p>Federal law enforcement agencies and financial regulators have been expanding their oversight of cryptocurrencies during the Biden administration. The Department of Justice announced earlier this year that it was beefing up its efforts to combat criminal use of crypto, especially in relation to ransomware attacks. This week the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) issued guidance on how Russian entities might use digital assets to evade U.S. sanctions against Moscow for the invasion of Ukraine.</p>

	<p>“This was launched as part of the U.S. counter-ransomware strategy that has been underway for several months,” an administration official said in a call with reporters Tuesday. “And the administration will continue to aggressively combat the misuse of cryptocurrency, including the use of it to evade U.S. sanctions.”</p> <p>The White House will also through the executive order examine equitable and safe access to financial services, support the “responsible development and use” of digital asset tech and explore whether the U.S. should have a central bank digital currency.</p> <p>“The United States should ensure that safeguards are in place and promote the responsible development of digital assets to protect consumers, investors, and businesses; maintain privacy; and shield against arbitrary or unlawful surveillance, which can contribute to human rights abuses.”</p> <p>The proposal was met with optimism from industry.</p> <p>“We should recognize the progress that today represents: The Biden Administration’s approach toward crypto has evolved from SEC lawsuits and blunt taxation proposals to recognition that cryptocurrency is here to stay,” said Adam Kovacevich, chief executive of tech company-funded trade group Chamber of Progress.</p> <p>“We applaud the White House for recognizing this as a defining moment for U.S. innovation on the world stage,” Faryar Shirzad, chief policy officer at Coinbase wrote in a tweet. “This is a hopeful moment.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 APT41 broke into 6 state networks
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/apt41-spies-broke-into-6-us-state-networks-via-livestock-app/178838/
GIST	<p>USAHerds – an app used (PDF) by farmers to speed their response to diseases and other threats to their livestock – has itself become an infection vector, used to pry open at least six U.S. state networks by one of China’s most prolific state-sponsored espionage groups.</p> <p>In a report published by Mandiant on Tuesday, researchers described a prolonged incursion conducted by APT41. They detected the activity in May 2021 and tracked it through last month, February 2022, observing the spy group pry open vulnerable, internet-facing web apps that were often written in ASP.NET.</p> <p>APT41 – aka Winnti, Barium, Wicked Panda or Wicked Spider – is an advanced persistent threat (APT) actor known for nation state-backed cyberespionage, supply-chain hits and profit-driven cybercrime.</p> <p>What’s the Point?</p> <p>APT41’s goals are unknown, researchers said, though they’ve observed evidence of the attackers exfiltrating personal identifiable information (PII).</p> <p>“Although the victimology and targeting of PII data is consistent with an espionage operation, Mandiant cannot make a definitive assessment at this time given APT41’s history of moonlighting for personal financial gain,” they wrote.</p> <p>Ther investigations have also revealed a slew of new techniques, malware variants, evasion methods and capabilities.</p> <p>“In most of the web application compromises, APT41 conducted .NET deserialization attacks; however, we have also observed APT41 exploiting SQL injection and directory traversal vulnerabilities,” they said.</p> <p>A deserialization attack is one in which attackers exploit a vulnerability to insert malicious objects into a web app, while SQL injection is a type of attack that allows a cyberattacker to interfere with the queries that an application makes to its database.</p>

SQL injection attacks are typically carried out by inserting malicious SQL statements into an entry field used by the website (like a comment field). Directory traversal, aka path traversal, is an HTTP attack that allows attackers to access restricted directories and execute commands outside of the web server's root directory.

Via Logs and a Cow-Tracking App

To hack into the states' networks, the threat actor used a zero-day vulnerability ([CVE-2021-44207](#)) in USAHerds (aka the Animal Health Emergency Reporting Diagnostic System), Mandiant reported. In the most recent campaigns, the actor also leveraged the now infamous zero-day in [Log4j](#) (CVE-2021-44228).

The USAHerd zero day flaw, which Acclaim Systems patched in November 2021, has to do with the app's use of hard-coded credentials to achieve remote code execution (RCE) on the system that runs it. The app is used in 18 states for animal health management.

Mandiant compared the bug to a previously reported vulnerability in Microsoft Exchange Server ([CVE-2020-0688](#)) – a bug that was still [under active attack](#) via ProxyShell attacks as of August 2021. The similarity between the two, researchers explained, is that “the applications used a static validationKey and decryptionKey (collectively known as the machineKey) by default.”

As a result, all installations of USAHerds shared these values, researchers explained, which is a no-no, being “against the best practice of using uniquely generated machineKey values per application instance.”

“Generating unique machineKey values is critical to the security of an ASP.NET web application because the values are used to secure the integrity of the ViewState,” they cautioned.

Mandiant couldn't figure out how APT41 originally obtained the machineKey values for USAHerds, but once the threat actors got that machineKey, they used it to compromise “any server on the Internet running USAHerds.”

Thus, researchers said, there are likely more victims than the six state networks, though they don't know who or what those victims are.

As far as APT41's use of the trio of bugs collectively known as Log4Shell goes, it's hardly surprising: Within hours of the initial Log4j flaw's [public disclosure](#) on Dec. 10, 2021, [attackers](#) were scanning for vulnerable servers and [unleashing quickly evolving attacks](#) to drop coin-miners, Cobalt Strike, the Orcus remote access trojan (RAT), reverse bash shells for future attacks, [Mirai and other botnets](#), and backdoors. By January 2022, Microsoft was observing rampant Log4j [exploit attempts](#) and testing.

Log4Shell exploits cause Java to fetch and deserialize a remote Java object, resulting in potential code execution, Mandiant explained.

“Similar to their previous web application targeting, APT41 continued to use [YSoSerial](#) generated deserialization payloads to perform reconnaissance and deploy backdoors,” according to the report.

“Notably, APT41 deployed a new variant of the [KEYPLUG](#) backdoor on Linux servers at multiple victims, a malware sub-family we now track as [KEYPLUG.LINUX](#). KEYPLUG is a modular backdoor written in C++ that supports multiple network protocols for command and control (C2) traffic including HTTP, TCP, KCP over UDP, and WSS.”

APT41 “heavily” used the Windows version of the KEYPLUG backdoor at state government victims between June 2021 and December 2021, researchers said. “Thus, the deployment of a ported version of the backdoor closely following the state government campaign was significant.”

After exploiting Log4Shell, the hackers continued to use deserialization payloads to issue ping commands to domains, researchers said: one of APT41's favorite techniques, which it used to go after government victims months prior.

After the group got access to a targeted environment, “APT41 performed host and network reconnaissance before deploying KEYPLUG.LINUX to establish a foothold in the environment,” Mandiant said. The cybersecurity firm gave sample commands, shown below, which were used to deploy KEYPLUG.LINUX.

A Swarm of Attacks

In one incident wherein Mandiant researchers spotted APT41 using SQL injection vulnerability in a proprietary web application to gain access, the attempt was quickly corralled. But two weeks later, the actor came back to compromise the network by exploiting the USAHerds zero day.

The hackers were coming after state agencies in rapid-fire, repeat attacks, they said. “In two other instances, Mandiant began an investigation at one state agency only to find that APT41 had also compromised a separate, unrelated agency in the same state,” according to Mandiant.

The APT was nimble, rapidly shifting to use publicly disclosed vulnerabilities to gain initial access into target networks, while also maintaining existing operations, according to the report.

The critical Log4J RCE vulnerability is a case in point: Within hours of the Dec. 10 advisory, APT41 began picking it apart. The attackers exploited Log4J to later compromise “at least two U.S. state governments as well as their more traditional targets in the insurance and telecommunications industries,” Mandiant said.

A Taste for States

Then, late last month, APT41 circled back to re-compromise two previous U.S. state government victims. “Our ongoing investigations show the activity closely aligns with APT41’s May-December 2021 activity, representing a continuation of their campaign into 2022 and demonstrating their unceasing desire to access state government networks,” according to the researchers.

APT 41 Still Quick on Its Feet

Mandiant outlined a catalog of updated tradecraft and new malware that shows that APT41 continues to be nimble, “highly adaptable” and “resourceful.”

“APT41’s recent activity against U.S. state governments consists of significant new capabilities, from new attack vectors to post-compromise tools and techniques,” researchers concluded.

“APT41 can quickly adapt their initial access techniques by re-compromising an environment through a different vector, or by rapidly operationalizing a fresh vulnerability. The group also demonstrates a willingness to retool and deploy capabilities through new attack vectors as opposed to holding onto them for future use,” the researchers said.

Exploiting Log4J in close proximity to the USAHerds campaign is a case in point: it showed that the group’s flexible when it comes to targeting U.S. state governments “through both cultivated and co-opted attack vectors,” Mandiant said.

So much for the U.S. [indictment](#) of five alleged APT41 members in September 2020: a grand jury move that was as easy for the group to hop over as a flattened cow patty.

“The scope and sophistication of the crimes in these unsealed indictments is unprecedented. The alleged criminal scheme used actors in China and Malaysia to illegally hack, intrude and steal information from victims worldwide,” said Michael Sherwin, acting U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, [in a DoJ statement](#) accompanying the Federal grand jury’s 2020 indictment. “As set forth in the charging documents, some of these criminal actors believed their association with the PRC provided them free license to hack and steal across the globe.”

Seventeen months later, that still sounds about right to Mandiant: “APT41 continues to be undeterred,” in spite of whatever the U.S. Department of Justice cares to throw in its path, researchers said.

HEADLINE	03/09 Fraudsters target e-commerce
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/identity-and-access/fraudsters-target-e-commerce-as-online-transactions-become-the-new-normal
GIST	<p>It's no secret that digital fraud attempts targeting online payment and financial accounts have jumped in the past two years, exacerbated by pandemic woes and a growth in e-commerce and digital financial services usage.</p> <p>However, a recent study underscores that cybercriminals are also worming their way to ill-gotten gains by targeting shipping, mining consumer and business identities and phishing to access bank and credit accounts and other valued data and steal money online. The TransUnion study, the 2022 Global Digital Fraud Trends Report released Tuesday, found that financial services is one of the two industries (along with travel and leisure) worldwide seeing the greatest increase in the rate of suspected digital fraud attempts in the past two years.</p> <p>In the United States, specifically, fraud attempts on financial services increased by more than 27% year over year — lower than the global growth rate of 33.5% of financial industry fraud efforts, but still enough to make it one of the five sectors to experience the greatest leap in fraudulent plays. (Gaming, travel and leisure, telecommunications and, interestingly, insurance were the other industries seeing the biggest growth in digital fraud ploys, “as consumer adoption of digital channels has continued to accelerate,” according to the TransUnion report.)</p> <p>“Digital channels have become the ‘new normal’ in the financial services industry and with it, it has created new opportunities for fraudsters,” said Shai Cohen, senior vice president and global head of fraud solutions at TransUnion. “Many consumers are conducting the majority of their financial transactions online, and since this is where many consumers are spending both time and money, it makes financial institutions a prime target for fraud.”</p> <p>These findings, based on TransUnion’s survey earlier this year of 12,500 adults around the world, certainly confirm what various industry experts have seen happening in the past two years as online banking and shopping have become widely embraced, even by digital laggards. Indeed, the rate for all types of digital fraud attempts worldwide rocketed up more than 52% between 2019 and 2021, according to TransUnion.</p> <p>However, the report also found that so-called “shipping fraud” — where a bad actor posing as a legitimate buyer spoofs a shipping address, or a malfeasant seller collects payment for goods or services bought online, but never fulfills the purchase — is on an even more aggressive rise, according to TransUnion’s findings. The global information company, known for its consumer credit reporting, found that shipping fraud has become the “fastest growing type of digital fraud worldwide, increasing nearly 800 percent” in the past year, and more than 15 times over between 2019 and 2021.</p> <p>As a result of this “new normal,” the financial, payments and retail industries have all experienced a boom in the acceptance of digital services, Cohen pointed out that “the propensity for shipping fraud has also increased.” Also related to this boost in financial interactions happening on the internet, the TransUnion report found that business identity theft (114% increase) and identity mining and phishing attempts (104%) more than doubled from 2020 to 2021. At least three out of five respondents to the TransUnion survey (62%) confessed that having their identity stolen was their greatest fear in terms of digital fraud.</p> <p>And basic banking accounts and payments were not the only financially related industries that saw fraud bumped up by the rise in online usage, according to the report. One of the five most affected industries, the U.S. insurance industry, saw fraud attempts alone grow by more than 11% from 2020 to 2021; and, over the past two years, actual successful cases of identity theft among U.S. insurers — where a legitimate customer’s accounts are taken over, their data is stolen and the information is used to submit false claims — has grown a whopping 82% since 2019, according to Cohen.</p>

	<p>While there is no way to completely eradicate fraud, or even to necessarily stem the rising tide of bad actors finding new ways to access accounts and impersonate real customers, Cohen said he believed there are steps financial institutions can take to “reduce fraud... [including] to detect suspicious patterns or attributes during the account opening and verification processes, in order to prevent fraudsters from getting in the door.”</p> <p>He recommended implementing multi-layered identity solutions to “help build trust with customers and thwart these fraud tactics.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Developer of China most advanced malware
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/apt/symantec-tracked-down-one-developer-of-chinas-most-advanced-piece-of-malware
GIST	<p>Researchers at Broadcom's Symantec, who detailed "China's most advanced piece of malware" on the last day of February, believe they have tracked down the pseudonym of one of its developers.</p> <p>"We have data which points the development of this tool to a certain persona in Chinese forums," said Vikram Thakur, technical director at Symantec Threat Intelligence.</p> <p>The malware, known as Daxin, would upend many assumptions about how China operates its espionage operations. Traditionally an actor not overly concerned with stealth, Daxin stayed under the radar for a decade or more.</p> <p>Daxin's low profile came from a clever hijacking of Windows TCP to disguise traffic as legitimate, announced in the February blog, and a limited set of targets. Symantec is only aware of "one or two" infections a year, said Thakur, which remained constant throughout the duration of the malware.</p> <p>"We have pretty decent visibility," he said. "One or two [for us] might convert to three or four" overall.</p> <p>Thakur spoke to SC as Symantec released two new blogs detailing the internals of the malware.</p> <p>The first explains how driver-based Daxin malware hooks into the Network Driver Interface Specification of Windows. The malware looks for a "magic byte" in the data section of TCP packets. Daxin can also reach out to its handler by staging a DNS request and interpreting the response. The connections initiate a key exchange to open a secure communications channel.</p> <p>The second blog details advanced communications between networked, infected systems and discloses the magic byte values — China has used two over time. The malware is optimized for complex instructions involving multiple machines. Using limited instructions, one system could tell a second to use a third as a proxy to contact a fourth.</p> <p>Thakur said that while the magic byte is an interesting internal quirk, attackers will, obviously, change the value after it has now been exposed. The best defense for network defenders is to search for anomalous drivers and unusual use of PowerShell, which Daxin's users take advantage of in the course of their attack.</p> <p>Symantec attributed the malware to a Chinese government-affiliated actor based on code overlaps and an instance where a Daxin was installed or attempted by actors attributable to China, both detailed in the February blog.</p> <p>Thakur estimated that 80% of targets were governments related to Chinese interests.</p> <p>As Symantec has catalogued infections, Thakur said that the vector for installation in all known cases were known vulnerabilities in internet-facing programs. The unknown cases originated on internet-facing systems.</p>

HEADLINE	03/09 Exposed Russia cloud databases targeted
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/over-90-exposed-russia-cloud/
GIST	<p>Pro-Ukraine hackers have compromised a large number of Russian cloud databases, deleting data, renaming files and potentially exfiltrating information for future attacks, researchers have confirmed.</p> <p>Jeremiah Fowler and a team at Website Planet decided to look at the campaign to “hack back” at Russian entities following the invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The Anonymous hacking collective announced on February 24 that it was “officially in cyber war” against the Russian government, while the Ukrainian vice prime minister, Mykhailo Fedorov, is organizing a volunteer “IT army” of hackers via Telegram to hit Russian targets.</p> <p>Fowler found that their efforts are starting to bear fruit. Out of a random sample of 100 misconfigured Russian cloud databases discovered via IoT engines and other legitimate techniques, 92 had been compromised.</p> <p>In the majority of these cases, attackers completely wiped the dataset with a script similar to the infamous MeowBot. Files were also renamed with pro-Ukrainian messages such as “putin stop this war,” “no war,” and “HackedByUkraine,” he said.</p> <p>One of the compromised databases belonged to the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).</p> <p>“Hundreds of folders in the database had been renamed to ‘putin_stop_this_war.’ In addition to the hack, it appears that the database exposed very weak administrative credentials and numerous emails. This would also make employees easy targets for social engineering to gain access deeper in the organization or social engineering,” Fowler explained.</p> <p>“We do not know if data was downloaded or what the hackers plan to do with this information, but most chances these exposed individuals face real risks of further cyber actions.”</p> <p>Hacktivists could theoretically use personal information exposed in such attacks to target individuals with spear-phishing and/or destructive malware.</p> <p>Other notable finds were a dataset managed by Russian internet provider “Green Dot” and a trove containing “a very large number” of secret keys referencing Russian email giant mail.ru as the host server.</p> <p>Although precise attribution is challenging, “we can only assume they are affiliated with or supporters of Anonymous based on the timeline of when the Russian databases were targeted,” Fowler said of the hackers responsible.</p> <p>The news comes as the Russian government yesterday revealed hackers had caused temporary outages of multiple agency websites by targeting an externally loaded widget used to collect visitor statistics.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Conti: \$6M on salaries, tools, services
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/conti-group-6m-salaries-tools/
GIST	<p>The infamous Conti ransomware collective spent millions on ‘business’ expenses last year and even tried to develop its own digital currency, according to a new report.</p> <p>Security vendor BreachQuest analyzed the recent leak of the pro-Russia group’s internal chat logs by a Ukrainian researcher, revealing fascinating details of its operations.</p>

Headed up by an individual named “Stern,” the group has an HR and recruitment lead, someone in charge of its data leak blog, a training specialist and a blockchain lead, as well as individuals in charge of an A, B and C team. Each of these alphabetized teams contains developers, pen testers, OSINT, admins, QA and reverse engineer experts, the report claimed.

Turnover of employees is high as per any criminal organization, although they are well compensated in Bitcoin. An estimated 485 individuals have gone through the Conti system, although this figure also includes potential candidates who have declined roles, as well as victims.

The criminal gang spent millions on remuneration and other internal outgoings, hinting at the huge profits it makes.

BreachQuest said it extracted 255 Bitcoin wallets and focused on those linked to “organizational” spending.

“They are few transactions made to these Bitcoin wallets. Many of them had less than three payments in total. These wallets act like shell companies and one-off payments to other Bitcoin wallets are made because they disguise transactions, so it does not stand out from the norm,” [the report explained](#).

“Studying the leaks, we see that Conti has spent an estimated \$6m on employee salary, tooling, and professional services from January 2021 to February 2022.”

As of June 2021, the group has also been fast-tracking a project to build a new altcoin in the Rust programming language, according to the report.

The news comes as the US government warns organizations of a potential spike in ransomware activity following crippling sanctions against Russia.

The Treasury’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) also urged all financial institutions to remain on the lookout for attempts by state actors and oligarchs to evade such sanctions via convertible virtual currency (CVC).

“Although we have not seen widespread evasion of our sanctions using methods such as cryptocurrency, prompt reporting of suspicious activity contributes to our national security and our efforts to support Ukraine and its people,” [said acting director Him Das](#).

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HEADLINE	03/09 Hackers fork open reverse tunneling tool
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-fork-open-source-reverse-tunneling-tool-for-persistence/
GIST	<p>Security experts have spotted an interesting case of a suspected ransomware attack that employed custom-made tools typically used by APT (advanced persistent threat) groups.</p> <p>Although no concrete connection between groups has been uncovered, the operational tactics, targeting scope, and malware customization capabilities signify a potential connection.</p> <p>As detailed in a report sent to Bleeping Computer by Security Joes, the threat actors observed in an attack against one of its clients in the gambling/gaming industry where a mix of custom-made and readily available open-source tools were used.</p> <p>The most notable cases are a modified version of Ligolo, a reverse tunneling utility that's freely available for pentesters on GitHub, and a custom tool to dump credentials from LSASS.</p> <p>Attack in the wild</p>

According to the incident responders at Security Joes, the attack unfolded on a weekend evening and followed a rapid development, showcasing the actors' skills and "red teaming" knowledge.

The initial access came through compromised employee SSL-VPN credentials, followed by admin scans and RDP brute-force, and then credential harvesting efforts.

The subsequent steps involved accessing additional machines with high privileges, the deployment of a custom proxy tunneling for secure communications, and finally, the dropping of Cobalt Strike.

Although the threat actors never had the chance to proceed any further in this particular case, Security Joes believes the next step would be to deploy a ransomware payload, as the methods followed match those of typical ransomware gang operations.

However, this part hasn't been confirmed as the responders stopped the execution of the payload before the infiltrators were ready to deploy anything on the compromised network.

Custom tools

The threat actors used several off-the-shelf open-source tools commonly used by numerous adversaries, like Mimikatz, SoftPerfect, and Cobalt Strike.

One notable differentiation is the deployment of 'Sockbot', a GoLang-written utility based on the Ligolo open-source reverse tunneling tool.

The hackers modified Ligolo with meaningful additions that removed the need to use command-line parameters and included several execution checks to avoid running multiple instances.

As a researcher of Security Joes told Bleeping Computer, a customized Ligolo isn't a common sight in the arsenal of any threat actors, apart from the Iranian state-sponsored MuddyWater hacking group, who is the only threat group known to modify it.

The reason for this rarity is that Ligolo isn't suitable for malicious deployment, so to make it fit intrusion operations, coding skills are required.

"Comparing the new variant (Sockbot) to the original source code available online, the threat actors added several execution checks to avoid multiple instances running at the same time, defined the value of the Local Relay as a hard-coded string to avoid the need of passing command line parameters when executing the attack and set the persistence via a scheduled task." - Security Joes

Another case of particular interest is 'lsassDumper', a custom tool also written in GoLang, used by the actors for automatic exfiltration from the LSASS process to the "transfer.sh" service.

Security Joes claims this is the first time lsassDumper has been spotted in the wild, which again demonstrates the particular threat actor's capacity and sophistication.

Also, direct dumping of credentials from LSASS is another typical method of ransomware gangs, so it's another element that backs this hypothesis.

Finally, the network infiltrators used ADFind for network reconnaissance, a freely available tool that adversaries use to gather information from the Active Directory, also very common in the ransomware space.

"Based on the behavior, the tools seen in this intrusion and the targeted sectors, we concluded that the attackers behind this operation are tightly related to a Russian-speaking ransomware gang, which is taking tools used by other groups and adding their personal signature to them." - concludes the report from Security Joes.

HEADLINE	03/09 Russia: govt. sites in supply chain attack
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/russian-government-sites-hacked-in-supply-chain-attack/
GIST	<p>Russia says some of its federal agencies' websites were compromised in a supply chain attack on Tuesday after unknown attackers hacked the stats widget used to track the number of visitors by multiple government agencies.</p> <p>The list of sites impacted in the attack includes the websites of the Energy Ministry, the Federal State Statistics Service, the Federal Penitentiary Service, the Federal Bailiff Service, the Federal Antimonopoly Service, the Culture Ministry, and other Russian state agencies.</p> <p>The incident was discovered Tuesday evening after the attackers published their own content and blocked access to the websites.</p> <p>"It is difficult to compromise these websites directly, so hackers attack resources through external services and thus gain access to demonstrate incorrect content," the press service of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development told Interfax.</p> <p>"After hacking the widget, hackers were able to publish incorrect content on the pages of the websites. The incident was promptly localized."</p> <p>The Russian Digital Development Ministry claims the state agencies' websites were brought back within an hour after the breach.</p> <p>Ukraine and Russia targeting each others' networks</p> <p>This comes after the Russian government shared a list of more than 17,000 IP addresses allegedly used in DDoS attacks against Russian networks.</p> <p>The Federal Security Service's National Coordination Center for Computer Incidents (NKTsKI) warned Russian organizations to take measures to counter threats to their information security and shared guidance to defend against such attacks.</p> <p>These warnings came after the Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Mykhailo Fedorov announced the creation of an "IT army" to support the country's "fight on the cyber front."</p> <p>The creation of the Ukrainian IT Army was revealed after the Defense Ministry of Ukraine started recruiting members of Ukraine's underground hacker community to launch cyberattacks against Russia and was prompted by a "massive wave of hybrid warfare."</p> <p>On Monday, the Russian Digital Development Ministry also denied reports that Russia plans to disconnect Russia from the worldwide web.</p> <p>"There are nonstop cyberattacks on Russian sites from abroad. We are getting prepared for various scenarios in order to ensure the accessibility of Russian [online] resources. There are no plans to switch off the internet from inside [the country]," a spokesperson told Interfax.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 CISA updates Conti ransomware alert
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-updates-conti-ransomware-alert-with-nearly-100-domain-names/?&web_view=true
GIST	The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has updated the alert on Conti ransomware with indicators of compromise (IoCs) consisting of close to 100 domain names used in malicious operations.

Originally published on September 22, 2021, the advisory includes details observed by CISA and the

Domains

badiwaw[.]com	fipoleb[.]com	kipitep[.]com	pihafi[.]com	tiyuzub[.]com
balacif[.]com	fofudir[.]com	kirute[.]com	pilagop[.]com	tubaho[.]com
barovur[.]com	fulujam[.]com	kogasiv[.]com	pipipub[.]com	vafici[.]com
basisem[.]com	ganobaz[.]com	kozoheh[.]com	pofifa[.]com	vegubu[.]com
bimafu[.]com	gerepa[.]com	kuxizi[.]com	radezig[.]com	vigave[.]com
bujoke[.]com	gucunug[.]com	kuyeguh[.]com	raferif[.]com	vipeded[.]com
buloxo[.]com	guvafe[.]com	lipozi[.]com	ragojel[.]com	vizosi[.]com
bumoyez[.]com	hakakor[.]com	lujecuk[.]com	rexagi[.]com	vojefe[.]com
bupula[.]com	hejalij[.]com	masaxoc[.]com	rimurik[.]com	vonavu[.]com
cajeti[.]com	hepide[.]com	mebonux[.]com	rinutov[.]com	wezeriw[.]com
cilomum[.]com	hesovaw[.]com	mihojip[.]com	rusoti[.]com	wideri[.]com
codasal[.]com	hewecas[.]com	modasum[.]com	sazoya[.]com	wudepen[.]com
comecal[.]com	hidusi[.]com	moduwoj[.]com	sidevot[.]com	wuluxo[.]com
dawasab[.]com	hireja[.]com	movufa[.]com	solobiv[.]com	wuvehus[.]com
derotin[.]com	hoguyum[.]com	nagahox[.]com	sufebul[.]com	wuvici[.]com
dihata[.]com	jecubat[.]com	nawusem[.]com	suhuhow[.]com	wuvidi[.]com
dirupun[.]com	jegufe[.]com	nerapo[.]com	sujaxa[.]com	xegogiv[.]com
dohigu[.]com	joxinu[.]com	newiro[.]com	tafobi[.]com	xekezix[.]com
dubacaj[.]com	kelowuh[.]com	paxobuy[.]com	tepiwo[.]com	
fecotis[.]com	kidukes[.]com	pazovet[.]com	tifiru[.]com	

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in Conti ransomware attacks targeting organizations in the U.S. The updated cybersecurity advisory contains data from the U.S. Secret Service.

Conti IoC domains

Internal details from the Conti ransomware operation started to leak at the end of February after the gang announced publicly that they side with Russia over the invasion of Ukraine.

The leak came from a Ukrainian researcher, who initially [published private messages](#) exchanged by the members of the gang and then [released the source code](#) for the ransomware, administrative panels, and other tools.

The cache of data also included domains used for compromises with BazarBackdoor, the malware used for initial access to networks of high-value targets.

CISA says that Conti threat actor has hit more than 1,000 organizations across the world, the most prevalent attack vectors being TrickBot malware and Cobalt Strike beacons.

The agency today released a batch of 98 domain names that share “registration and naming characteristics similar” to those used in Conti ransomware attacks from groups distributing the malware.

The [agency notes](#) that while the domains have been used in malicious operations some of them “may be abandoned or may share similar characteristics coincidentally.”

The above list of domains associated with Conti ransomware attacks appear to be different from the hundreds that the Ukrainian researcher leaked from BazarBackdoor infections.

Despite the unwanted attention that Conti received recently due to the exposure of its internal chats and tools, the gang did not pull the brakes on its activity.

Since the beginning of March, Conti listed on its website more than two dozen victims in the U.S. Canada, Germany, Switzerland, U.K., Italy, Serbia, and Saudi Arabia.

HEADLINE	03/09 MicroBackdoor targets Ukraine agencies
SOURCE	https://portswigger.net/daily-swig/government-agencies-in-ukraine-targeted-in-cyber-attacks-deploying-microbackdoor-malware?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>A cyber-attack campaign targeting Ukrainian government agencies with MicroBackdoor malware has been confirmed by the country's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-UA).</p> <p>In a statement released earlier this week (March 7), CERT-UA confirmed that government organizations have been the target of several malicious attacks.</p> <p>According to intelligence gathered by the agency, phishing emails containing a file named 'dovidka.zip', which contains a contextual help file (Microsoft Compiled HTML Help) 'dovidka.chm'.</p> <p>The file contained the bait image 'image.jpg', which CERT-UA said was information on the procedure for frequent artillery shelling, and HTA-file 'file.htm' which contained malicious code in VBScript.</p> <p>Execution of the malicious code would result in the running of the dropper 'ignit.vbs', which will decode the .NET loader 'core.dll', later executing the MicroBackdoor malware.</p> <p>Premeditated attacks?</p> <p>According to CERT-UA, the backdoor and loader were created in January 2022, before Russia's invasion of the country.</p> <p>The agency claims that malware campaign bares similarities to the activities of the UAC-0051 threat group, also known as 'unc1151', which according to Mandiant has links to the Belarussian government.</p> <p>The statement from CERT-UA contains further information on the attack.</p> <p>Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24. Since this time, there have been a number of cyber-attacks targeting organizations across the country.</p> <p>As previously reported by <i>The Daily Swig</i>, a newly discovered strain of data-wiping malware has also surfaced in the eastern European country.</p> <p>The Windows-specific data wiper has appeared on "hundreds of machines", according to telemetry from information security firm ESET.</p> <p>Although primarily directed towards Ukraine, the newly named 'HermeticWiper' malware strain has also been detected in the Baltic states of Latvia and Lithuania.</p> <p>Date stamps on the malware indicate that it was compiled two months ago – evidence that the attack was possibly premeditated.</p> <p>Victims of the malware campaign include financial organizations and government contractors, the Wall Street Journal reports.</p> <p>Other targets</p> <p>At least 30 Ukrainian university websites were also hacked in a targeted attack allegedly conducted by threat actors identified as the 'Monday Group', which has reportedly publicly supported Russia's recent actions.</p> <p>The group, whose members refer to themselves as 'the Mx0nday', have targeted the WordPress-hosted sites more than 100,000 times since the invasion.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Ukraine musters army of citizen-hackers
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SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/9/ukraine-musters-army-citizen-hackers-info-wars-rus/
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine — From an apartment on a quiet street in Lviv in the still-unscathed western reaches of Ukraine, two childhood friends now in their early 20s have been waging a quiet invasion deep within Russia’s borders.</p> <p>With intense shelling and ground battles playing out in cities throughout eastern Ukraine, Marco, an information technology consultant, and Roman, who works in graphic design and marketing, see themselves as foot soldiers in a fierce information war. Fighting the war, they said, are hundreds of thousands of ordinary Ukrainians who have come together to hack Russian websites and present to the Russian people the reality of the raging ground war that the Kremlin has banned official media from reporting.</p> <p>“The point of this is to create a distraction to deal with inside their own country instead of sending a lot of military to our country,” said Marco, who, like Roman, requested that his real name be concealed. “So when Russia’s nuclear plant management system is down, they may think about fixing it instead of sending a lot of troops to die here.”</p> <p>After responding to a call for “digital talents” from Ukrainian “Minister for Digital Transformation” Mykhailo Fedorov, Marco and Roman are part of the “IT Army of Ukraine,” a ragtag group of hackers operating inside and outside Ukraine. The hackers attack official and unofficial Russian websites and design information campaigns that they distribute through text messages and on social media.</p> <p>Official numbers of those involved in the cyberoffensive are difficult to pin down. The “IT Army of Ukraine” Telegram chatroom, used to distribute “operational tasking” to the hackers, has more than 300,000 subscribers.</p> <p>“List of Russian oil and gas and energy companies,” says one post from Wednesday that includes URLs. “Let’s make these resources inaccessible! Take it down please!”</p> <p>Other targets include municipal websites and major Russian state media sites.</p> <p>Marco said he works with about 50,000 people dedicated to distributed denial of service attacks. Although DDoS attacks require coordination, they can be carried out by swarms of people without significant technical acumen.</p> <p>“The main concept of a DDoS attack is creating a huge load on the site,” Marco said. “Like hundreds of thousands of people entering the site at one time.”</p> <p>Little equipment or software is needed. A DDoS attack can essentially be carried out from any laptop or cellphone with a web browser.</p> <p>It is difficult to gauge how effective the group of amateur hackers has been. Although DDoS attacks have knocked several Russian government websites offline, they are generally thwarted through countermeasures.</p> <p>A need to coordinate</p> <p>James Knight, a cybersecurity consultant for U.S.-based cyberwarfare, said the massive decentralized effort raises legal questions and could cause more problems for professionals in the intelligence community. The uncoordinated attacks could thwart intelligence-collection activities of friendly countries, he added.</p> <p>“The trouble is that there is a lot of real hacking that is going on within governments like the U.S. government, for instance,” he said. “Generally, they don’t take something down unless they have to.”</p>

When an uncoordinated attack takes down a site, he said, the opportunity to use that site for other purposes is off the table.

“So in the intelligence world, what we see is that these people who are doing this cause more problems than they fix,” he said. “The best thing they could do is try and get hold of U.S. intelligence who would be coordinating with other agencies and kind of coordinate with them before they start doing these things.”

Still, he said, such coordination is nearly impossible when hundreds of thousands of people are volunteering in the middle of a hot war.

The Ukrainian hacker army has also waged an all-out assault on what it says are the Kremlin’s efforts to hide the truth about the war from the Russian people.

“Basically, there is so little information in Russia that Russian moms of troops that are dying or captured here don’t know their sons are even here,” Marco said. “They contact their military service, and they say, ‘Hey, everything is all right,’ after her son calls her and tells her, ‘I’m captured. You need to help me.’ They’re basically lying to the moms of those troops, and I’m pretty convinced their moms don’t want to be lied to.”

Roman said he began compiling lists of thousands of Russian phone numbers where he sent text messages with death toll numbers and pictures of captured soldiers.

“I think we just want for people to understand what’s actually happening so they can go out and demand their rights,” Roman said. “Mothers are being told not to criticize the army, and they’re not being told anything about their sons.”

The Russian government quickly caught on to the campaign, Marco said, and began manually reviewing text messages.

Since then, the group has changed tactics. It now posts ads on social media and includes pictures and updates from the war in unlikely places such as Google reviews for restaurants in Moscow.

Roman said the group monitors responses to their posts and adjusts messaging to reach a broader audience. More recently, he said, the Ukrainian hackers have focused on messaging around the economic impact of sanctions on Russia and the number of popular U.S. and Western commercial brands abandoning Russia. He said engagement has been through the roof.

“Russians don’t really care how many people are dying here,” he said, but the economic fallout sparks a major reaction.

The two said they expect Russia to crack down on their activities soon, and they are planning campaigns to rally support from Western countries.

“Specifically, we really want them to demand action from their officials on shutting down the sky,” Marco said. “The more [countries] involved in this, the quicker this ends and the more people who will be safe.”

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HEADLINE	03/09 ICE smartphone app monitors immigrants
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/deportation-agents-use-smartphone-app-to-monitor-immigrants/
GIST	LOS ANGELES (AP) — U.S. authorities have broadly expanded the use of a smartphone app during the coronavirus pandemic to ensure immigrants released from detention will attend deportation hearings, a requirement that advocates say violates their privacy and makes them feel they’re not free.

More than 125,000 people — many of them stopped at the U.S.-Mexico border — are now compelled to install the app known as SmartLink on their phones, up from around 5,000 less than three years ago. It allows officials to easily check on them by requiring the immigrants to send a selfie or make or receive a phone call when asked.

Although the technology is less cumbersome than an ankle monitor, advocates say tethering immigrants to the app is unfair considering many have paid bond to get out of U.S. detention facilities while their cases churn through the country's backlogged immigration courts. Immigration proceedings are administrative, not criminal, and the overwhelming majority of people with cases before the courts aren't detained.

Advocates said they're concerned about how the U.S. government might use data culled from the app on immigrants' whereabouts and contacts to round up and arrest others on immigration violations.

"It's kind of been shocking how just in a couple of years it has exploded so quickly and is now being used so much and everywhere," said Jacinta Gonzalez, senior campaign director for the Latino rights organization Mijente. "It's making it much easier for the government to track a larger number of people."

The use of the app by Immigration and Customs Enforcement soared during the pandemic, when many government services went online. It continued to grow as President Joe Biden called on the Department of Justice to curb the use of private prisons. His administration has also voiced support for so-called alternatives to detention to ensure immigrants attend required appointments such as immigration court hearings.

Meanwhile, the number of cases before the long-backlogged U.S. immigration court system has soared to 1.6 million. Immigrants often must wait for years to get a hearing before a judge who will determine whether they can stay in the country legally or should be deported.

Since the pandemic, U.S. immigration authorities have reduced the number of immigrants in detention facilities and touted detention alternatives such as the app.

The SmartLink app comes from BI Inc, a Boulder, Colorado-based subsidiary of private prison company The GEO Group. GEO, which runs immigration detention facilities for ICE under other contracts, declined to comment on the app.

Officials at Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security, declined to answer questions about the app, but said in a statement that detention alternatives "are an effective method of tracking noncitizens released from DHS custody who are awaiting their immigration proceedings."

In recent congressional testimony, agency officials wrote that the SmartLink app is also cheaper than detention: it costs about \$4.36 a day to put a person on a detention alternative and more than \$140 a day to hold someone in a facility, agency budget estimates show.

Advocates say immigrants who spent months in detention facilities and were released on bond are being placed on the app when they go to an initial meeting with a deportation officer, and so are parents and children seeking asylum on the southwest border.

Initially, SmartLink was seen as a less intensive alternative to ankle monitors for immigrants who had been detained and released, but is now being used widely on immigrants with no criminal history and who have not been detained at all, said Julie Mao, deputy director of the immigrant rights group Just Futures. Previously, immigrants often only attended periodic check ins at agency offices.

"We're very concerned that that is going to be used as the excessive standard for everyone who's in the immigration system," Mao said.

While most people attend their immigration court hearings, some do skip out. In those cases, immigration judges issue deportation orders in the immigrants' absence, and deportation agents are tasked with trying to find them and return them to their countries. During the 2018 fiscal year, about a quarter of immigration judges' case decisions were deportation orders for people who missed court, court data shows.

Advocates questioned whether monitoring systems matter in these cases, noting someone who wants to avoid court will stop checking in with deportation officers, trash their phone and move, whether on SmartLink or not.

They said they're concerned that deportation agents could be tracking immigrants through SmartLink more than they are aware, just as commercial apps tap into location data on people's phones.

In the criminal justice system, law enforcement agencies are using similar apps for defendants awaiting trial or serving sentences. Robert Magaletta, chief executive of Louisiana-based Shadowtrack Technologies, said the technology doesn't continually track defendants but records their locations at check ins, and that the company offers a separate, full-time tracking service to law enforcement agencies using tamperproof watches.

In a 2019 Congressional Research Service report, ICE said the app wasn't continually monitoring immigrants. But advocates said even quick snapshots of people's locations during check ins could be used to track down friends and coworkers who lack proper immigration authorization. They noted immigration investigators pulled GPS data from the ankle monitors of Mississippi poultry plant workers to help build a case for a large workplace raid.

For immigrants released from detention with ankle monitors that irritate the skin and beep loudly at times, the app is an improvement, said Mackenzie Mackins, an immigration attorney in Los Angeles. It's less painful and more discreet, she said, adding the ankle monitors made her clients feel they were viewed by others as criminals.

But SmartLink can be stressful for immigrants who came to the U.S. fleeing persecution in their countries, and for those who fear a technological glitch could lead to a missed check in.

Roseanne Flores, a paralegal at Hilf and Hilf in Troy, Michigan, said she recently fielded panicked calls from clients because the app wasn't working. They wound up having to report in person to immigration agents' offices instead.

"I see the agony it causes the clients," Flores said. "My heart goes out to them."

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	03/10 Military: need commandos back in Somalia
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-military-urges-biden-to-place-commandos-in-somalia-as-militant-threat-worsens-11646914851
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya—The American military is asking President Biden to station several hundred commandos in Somalia to help blunt the spread of al Qaeda's aggressive local affiliate, al-Shabaab, according to U.S. officials.</p> <p>Military commanders want the White House to reverse then-President Donald Trump's last-minute order to withdraw some 700 Army Green Berets, Navy SEALs and Marine Raiders from bases in Somalia, where they had been training an elite local unit to fight al-Shabaab, according to the officials. The Pentagon moved most of the American commandos to neighboring Djibouti and Kenya.</p>

“Since U.S. forces have come out of Somalia last January, we assess there is an uptick in al-Shabaab activities,” said a senior U.S. intelligence official, adding that “there has been no pressure on al-Shabaab at this point and they have freedom of movement.”

The Pentagon considers al-Shabaab to be [al Qaeda's most-potent franchise](#) world-wide and estimates its strength at 5,000 to 7,000 fighters. The U.S. has conducted a [special-operations war](#) against the group since 2007, much of it shielded from public view.

The military is asking Mr. Biden to deploy troops now stationed in Djibouti and Kenya back to Somalia. Senior officers argue that local soldiers fight more effectively when consistently side-by-side with experienced U.S. special-operators, even if the Americans avoid ground combat and limit their role to training and air support. Commanders also say frequent movement in and out of Somalia itself carries unnecessary risks for U.S. troops.

Mr. Biden hasn't announced his decision. “As a matter of policy we do not comment on potential troop deployments,” a National Security Council spokeswoman said.

But there is a growing sense the military will get many, if not all, of the troops it is seeking. “I believe we will be given permission in the near term to be able to have a more persistent presence in Somalia,” said a senior military official.

Mr. Trump dismayed many military commanders when he issued the withdrawal order in the final weeks of his term, amid his wider effort to wind down conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. At the time, the Pentagon scrambled to reassure nervous African governments and allies that the U.S. was “not withdrawing or disengaging from Africa.”

The incoming Biden administration immediately put the decision under review as part of a larger reassessment of U.S. forces abroad, while allowing American troops to visit Somalia periodically to train the local commando unit, the Danab, or Lightning.

At the same time, Mr. Biden has sharply reduced the number of U.S. drone strikes against al-Shabaab fighters, which, due to the risk of civilian casualties, sometimes stir up public opposition in Somalia.

Mr. Trump conducted 203 airstrikes during his four-year term, including two the day before he left office, according to data from U.S. Africa Command. During Mr. Biden's first 13 months as president, the military has carried out five airstrikes, most recently last month when Somali troops requested assistance to repel an al-Shabaab attack.

U.S. officials say it has proven more difficult to coordinate air attacks on al-Shabaab without having troops on the ground in Somalia.

The N.S.C. spokeswoman said the Biden administration takes a “holistic” approach to Somalia, where pressing issues run from drought-induced hunger and militant violence to regional schisms, political infighting and clan rivalries. Such an approach involves synchronized strategies from the Pentagon, State Department and Agency for International Development, officials say.

Top U.S. officers have been wary about exerting public pressure on the White House to back their request to move troops back into Somalia. But in recent months, they have become increasingly outspoken about their sense that al-Shabaab fighters are gaining ground while American troops commute to the battlefield.

“The threat of al-Shabaab is growing,” Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander of U.S. forces in Africa, told Voice of America in January. “And if increased pressure is not applied to al-Shabaab, I'm concerned that there's going to be a significant al-Shabaab attack.”

Al-Shabaab killed 67 people in a Nairobi, Kenya, shopping mall in 2013. Two years later, the militants killed almost 150 at Kenya's Garissa University, near the Somalia border, searching out Christians to

target among the students. And in 2017, the group allegedly detonated a truck bomb that left nearly 600 dead in Mogadishu, Somalia's capital.

In 2019, the group declared American civilians to be legitimate targets. U.S. officials say the militants present a potent threat to American interests in East Africa.

In 2020, al-Shabaab killed one U.S. soldier and two American civilian contractors at a military base in Manda Bay, Kenya, near the Somalia border. U.S. troops were there to train Kenyan soldiers serving in a large African Union force deployed to Somalia since 2007.

"If there continues to be no pressure on [al-Shabaab], the concern would be that they would become a threat to the homeland," the intelligence official said.

In addition to carrying out ambushes, planting roadside booby-traps, detonating bombs in cities, assassinating officials and taking over villages, al-Shabaab extorts revenue from ports and other businesses, taking in an estimated \$130 million a year. The group spends some of that wealth on weapons and transfers a portion to al Qaeda global leaders in Pakistan and Syria, according to U.S. officials.

Mohamed Mubarak, an independent political analyst, said Somali government officials were alarmed when Mr. Trump pulled out U.S. special operators.

"They put al-Shabaab on the defensive—it was going well," Mr. Mubarak said. "Nobody expected the operation would end without warning." The Danab, Somalia's U.S.-trained special-operations unit, has been the only force keeping the militants in check, he said.

Somali government spokesmen didn't return calls and messages seeking comment on the prospect of the Americans returning on an enduring basis.

Uncertainty over the U.S. position in Somalia mirrors growing questions about Western policy in other volatile areas of Africa.

Al Qaeda and Islamic State-aligned extremists have intensified attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in the Sahel, the semiarid band just south of the Sahara. Military coups in Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso, however, have driven a wedge between Western militaries and some former allies in the region.

France announced last month it is pulling thousands of troops out of Mali, but will likely shift them to neighboring countries. The U.S. has suspended plans to station a Green Beret team in Burkina Faso to train local commandos.

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HEADLINE	03/09 France: 4 convicted; terrorist conspiracy
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/priest-murder-islamic-state-convicted-trial-latest
GIST	<p>Four men have been convicted in Paris of terrorist conspiracy after the murder of a Catholic priest in a Normandy church in 2016, an attack claimed by the Islamic State group.</p> <p>The four were handed sentences of between eight years and life in prison over the attack on Father Jacques Hamel, 85, who was stabbed in his church in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray by two 19-year-olds as he finished mass. Two nuns and an elderly couple were held hostage before the assailants slashed the priest's throat and seriously injured another elderly churchgoer.</p> <p>The two attackers, Abdel Malik Petitjean and Adel Kermiche, were killed by police as they left the church. The four men on trial were accused of having helped or encouraged the attack.</p> <p>The archbishop for the region welcomed Wednesday's verdict, and the lawyer for the injured man described an unusual feeling of "spirituality" at the trial. Families of victims held hands with the defendants, and the injured man testified that he forgave them, the lawyer said.</p>

Only three defendants were present at the trial, and the other was convicted in absentia.

The three present did not play a role in carrying out the attack, but were part of the attackers' entourage. During the trial, they asked for forgiveness and admitted that they voluntarily associated with individuals who were preparing to commit terrorist crimes. But they argued that was not enough to mark them as terrorists, too.

Prosecutors disagreed, and the judges found all of them guilty of criminal association with terrorists.

Jean-Philippe Steven Jean-Louis, 25, was sentenced to 13 years in prison for trying to go to Syria with one of the attackers, and for his Islamic proselytism on Telegram.

A cousin of one of the attackers, Farid Khelil, was sentenced to 10 years. Prosecutors said he was informed of the attack plan and that he had supported it. He testified at the trial that he is bisexual, non-religious and spent his time drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis, in an apparent effort to distance himself from the religious extremists.

Yassine Sebaihia was sentenced to eight years, after he had crossed France to join one of the attackers for "religion lessons".

The biggest punishment was handed to the absent defendant: Rachid Kassim, a Frenchman who was a notorious Islamic State recruiter, was sentenced to life in prison. Kassim, believed to have been killed in a drone strike in 2017 in Iraq, is suspected of having used social media to encourage the attack on the priest. Kassim had already received a life sentence in absentia in 2019 for having ordered a failed attack near Notre Dame cathedral.

The Archbishop of Rouen said in a statement: "Justice was served ... [the court] had to convict these men for the good of society."

Lawyer Mehana Mouhou said that at the trial, "No one was there in hate or vengeance."

It was one of several trials over a string of Islamic State-related attacks on France. Trial is still underway into the worst of them: the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015 which killed 130 people in the Bataclan theater, national stadium and multiple cafes.

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HEADLINE	03/10 Lost hope: Afghan girls denied education
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/mar/10/robbed-of-hope-afghan-girls-denied-an-education-struggle-with-depression
GIST	<p>There was an English exam under way when news began to circulate that the Taliban had reached Kabul. Panic spread and Yamna was among the students who never finished that exam paper – and never returned to school.</p> <p>Six months on, the 16-year-old has barely left her house and says she feels very low, wondering whether she will ever be able to finish her education, or what job prospects she has in a country ruled by a conservative, male-only government.</p> <p>Since August, secondary school girls from grade 7 and up have effectively been banned from education. While the Taliban claims the restrictions are temporary, saying they want to create the right Islamic environment for girls to learn, Afghanistan remains the world's only country where girls are barred from education.</p> <p>Kabul pharmacist Mohammed Mohibullah says that while the overall sales of antidepressants and sleeping pills have gone down, the number of women buying such medication has increased. "Since the Taliban's</p>

takeover, it has been mostly peaceful. The war has stopped and there have been fewer attacks. But what I'm noticing now is a sharp rise in women asking for antidepressants, stress relievers or sleeping pills, even without a specific prescription. They are under a lot of pressure. While many men tell me they feel more at ease compared to before, it is the opposite for women and girls."

Medical professionals in the country warn they are seeing a rise in depression among teenage girls. "Afghans – especially girls who have been at home for the past months – are confronted with an even more uncertain future than before. For many, this has fostered stress and hopelessness, which has caused depression to rise. Many feel as if they have lost control of their dreams, goals – their lives," says psychologist Rohullah Rezvani, adding that, with society still largely stigmatising mental health, most Afghans never seek professional help and are often left struggling for years.

"People will admit to 'having problems' and might even take medication to calm stress levels, but that's about it," Rezvani says.

Muska, an ambitious 15-year-old who one day wants to pursue medical studies, says she has "lost hope".

"We always lived in fear of daily attacks, but for me, not going to school and not knowing what my future holds is still worse," she says. "I was nearby several explosions, with one of them being a close call. It was scary, but I always had hope that the situation would eventually improve and that there could be a future where girls and women have equal rights and opportunities. The Taliban have robbed me of that hope," she says from her Kabul home, which she has barely left since August. "When they first announced the ban, I couldn't stop crying. I felt paralysed. Living without purpose makes my life meaningless." For months, Muska has spent her days doing little but watch television. "I can't even get myself to study and I haven't seen any of my friends. For what kind of future anyway?"

The Taliban say girls will eventually be allowed back to school. Deputy minister of culture and information, Zabihullah Mujahid, says the group is "not against education", even though girls' schools across Kabul remain closed, with just a few provincial schools remaining open to girls.

"The policies pursued by the Taliban are discriminatory, unjust and violate international law," says Amnesty International's secretary general, Agnès Callamard, urging the reopening of all secondary schools to girls. "Across the country, the rights and aspirations of an entire generation of girls are dismissed and crushed."

Teachers and activists have already opened ad hoc schools, similar to the secret schools of the previous 1996 to 2001 Taliban regime. Gatherings are mostly held in people's homes. Laila Haideri, who runs one of the schools, teaching English and computer science, says she hopes it will help counter loneliness and foster ambitions many girls might have lost. "Regardless of what the Taliban decides and what the future holds, we will not let our girls stop learning," she says.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	03/09 Salmon 'sue' Seattle: harm to population
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/09/salmon-sue-us-seattle-harm-population
GIST	<p>An Indigenous nation is turning to a novel legal tactic in the hopes that it can save a beleaguered salmon population: it is suing on the salmon's behalf, alleging that dams preventing it from migrating are a violation of the fish's "inherent rights to exist, flourish, regenerate, and evolve".</p> <p>The lawsuit is part of the growing "rights of nature" movement, a legal theory that seeks to give natural entities, like rivers or plants or animals, similar legal rights to humans.</p>

The salmon, called TsuladxW in the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe's Lushootseed language, are named plaintiffs in the case. [The dammed rivers](#) in Washington state no longer provide enough salmon for the tribe to conduct all of their ceremonies, let alone feed their members, and scientists have determined that nearby dams [are hurting the salmon population](#).

The tribe is arguing that the dams are violating TsuladxW's fourth amendment right to be free from illegal seizures and their due process rights.

Jack Fiander, a tribal member and lawyer representing the tribe in the court case, said the tribe is forcing the owner of the three dams – the city of Seattle – and the courts to recognize rights that the tribe has always believed fish have.

"People need to know that these are our laws and if you come into our territory and do things that affect us you should be familiar with our laws and show us respect," Fiander said. "These tribal beliefs shouldn't be ridiculed. They're based on ancestral knowledge that shouldn't be discounted."

The rights of nature movement has only recently gained traction in the United States.

Ecuador granted legal rights to all natural beings in its [constitution](#) in 2008 and [an Indian court](#) gave legal personhood to two rivers, the Ganges and the Yamuna, in 2017.

In the US, some local governments have attempted to pass laws that give legal rights to natural entities, like the City of Toledo granting a "Bill of Rights" to Lake Erie in 2019 ([it was struck down](#) by a federal judge a year later). But the American rights of nature movement has largely been driven by Native American attorneys and tribes like the White Earth Nation, a tribe located in Minnesota that [passed a law in 2018](#) recognizing manoomin, a wild rice sacred to the tribe, as having inherent legal rights.

[Last summer](#), the tribe sued the Minnesota department of natural resources on behalf of the manoomin, arguing that a recent permit for a new natural gas pipeline violated the rice's right to "exist and flourish".

Seattle's public utility has asked a federal judge to dismiss the Sauk-Suiattle case, arguing that the city's Skagit River dams are outside the tribe's jurisdiction. The public utility declined to comment on the lawsuit but said in a statement to the Guardian that they "value our longstanding relationship with the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe and continue to work closely with the Sauk-Suiattle and other Tribes on many issues related to hydropower operations, including protecting and strengthening fish populations".

Both the Minnesota pipeline and the Skagit River dams are already subject to extensive environmental regulations, but advocates for rights of nature say that these existing protections are inadequate because there is little recourse when regulators overlook or weaken the rules. For example, Seattle negotiated a 1995 deal with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) that allows the city to damage salmon habitat by draining a portion of the Skagit River, even though the river's salmon are listed in the Endangered Species Act.

If salmon or the river had their own rights there would be a legal route to demand environmental justice anytime a regulator ignores protections, according to Elizabeth Kronk Warner, the dean of the SJ Quinney College of Law at the University of Utah.

"People will ultimately bargain for and negotiate for something that might be in their best interest rather than the river's best interest," Kronk Warner said. "At the end of the day an individual acting in their individual capacity is just not going to be able to protect the rights of nature in the same way that the natural element can itself."

Seattle is currently negotiating a new license with the FERC that could last as long as 50 years. With wild salmon disappearing, Fiander said the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe can no longer trust agencies like the FERC to protect their sacred fish.

	“You can’t count on that federal agency to do the right thing. They take into account business considerations and so using these other legal means is appropriate,” Fiander said. “What Seattle is doing could go on for 50 years and the salmon could be extinct within 10 or 15.”
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HEADLINE	03/09 ‘Australia getting harder to live in’
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/world/australia/nsw-floods.html
GIST	<p>MELBOURNE, Australia — Australia’s prime minister declared a national emergency on Wednesday as more than a week of severe rain along the country’s eastern coast has caused some of the worst flooding in Australian history and inundated swaths of two of its largest cities.</p> <p>The prime minister, Scott Morrison, said that the declaration would fast-track aid and supplies to the most devastated areas, where the bodies of missing people have been found submerged in floodwaters, and dozens of evacuation orders have forced thousands from their homes.</p> <p>It was the first time that a national emergency — a legislative power created after the deadly wildfires in early 2020 — had been declared.</p> <p>“I feel deeply and empathize absolutely with how people feel when they find themselves in this situation,” Mr. Morrison said during a visit to Lismore, a flood-ravaged city in the state of New South Wales, where some people protested what they called government inaction. Mr. Morrison added, “This is a very complex and very challenging environment.”</p> <p>In addition to the emergency declaration, the prime minister said he had signed off on tens of million of dollars in additional federal support for affected people, including disaster payments of 2,000 Australian dollars, or roughly \$1,460, per adult and 800 Australian dollars, or \$585, per child.</p> <p>At least 20 people have died in the flooding, and more than 60,000 people are under evacuation orders, according to the authorities. Hundreds of schools are closed, and people in the Illawarra region, on the coast of New South Wales, and in the Sydney metropolitan area have been asked to refrain from all but emergency travel.</p> <p>The extreme rain, which has led to the wettest start to any year on record in Sydney and the second wettest in Brisbane, the capital of Queensland, was brought on by two intense low-pressure systems in two weeks. Parts of Sydney have had more than 34 inches of rain this year, an amount that the city usually doesn’t reach until August.</p> <p>In New South Wales, floodwaters are rising rapidly, inundating the suburbs of Sydney as well as rural towns across the state.</p> <p>In Sydney, the Roseville Bridge, which sits nearly 60 feet above the usual water level and is used by tens of thousands of commuters each day, appeared almost to rise from a lake. Outside flooded homes, residents built piles of waterlogged possessions and ruined furniture. Some paddled through the floods on kayaks or rubber dinghies, while others waded through waters that rose almost to their waist.</p> <p>As of Wednesday, more than 100,000 people had filed claims related to the floods, according to the Insurance Council of Australia, with the majority in Queensland. The cost of the flooding is expected to exceed 2 billion Australian dollars, or just under \$1.5 billion, according to the ratings agency S&P.</p> <p>Climate protesters and residents of Lismore turned out at Mr. Morrison’s appearance to decry inaction from the federal government on both the flooding and on climate change more generally. Some carried signs that read “He’s a real nowhere man,” referring to Mr. Morrison, or “This is what climate change looks like.”</p>

	<p>As a federal election approaches, Mr. Morrison’s center-right Liberal Party has come under increased scrutiny for what many describe as a long history of minimizing the threat of global warming. Australia was one of the last wealthy countries to set a 2050 target for net-zero emissions, despite being repeatedly battered by extreme weather events, including catastrophic fires, drought and widespread flooding.</p> <p>Speaking on Wednesday, Mr. Morrison acknowledged that a changing climate was a factor in the flooding, a move seen by some as a nod to a frustrated electorate. “We are dealing with a different climate to the one we were dealing with before,” he said, adding: “Australia is getting harder to live in because of these disasters.”</p> <p>But the complexity of the weather systems involved in extreme rain makes it hard to determine the exact role of climate change in the flooding, even if its effect on Australia more generally is undeniable, said Andrew King, a lecturer in climate science at the University of Melbourne.</p> <p>“For things like extreme heat events, we’ve got a very clear climate change fingerprint,” he said. “But for these kinds of multiday, extreme rain events that cause flooding, it’s quite hard to tell what the role of climate change is.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 First person in pig heart transplant dies
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/health/heart-transplant-pig-bennett.html
GIST	<p>The first person to have his failing heart replaced with that of a genetically altered pig in a groundbreaking operation died Tuesday afternoon at the University of Maryland Medical Center, two months after the transplant surgery.</p> <p>David Bennett Sr., who lived in Maryland, was 57. He had severe heart disease, and had agreed to receive the experimental pig’s heart after he was rejected from several waiting lists to receive a human heart.</p> <p>It was unclear whether his body had rejected the foreign organ. “There was no obvious cause identified at the time of his death,” a hospital spokeswoman said.</p> <p>Hospital officials said they could not comment further on the cause of death, because his physicians had yet to conduct a thorough examination. They plan to publish the results in a peer-reviewed medical journal.</p> <p>Dr. Bartley Griffith, the surgeon who performed the transplant, said the hospital’s staff was “devastated” by the loss of Mr. Bennett.</p> <p>“He proved to be a brave and noble patient who fought all the way to the end,” Dr. Griffith said. “Mr. Bennett became known by millions of people around the world for his courage and steadfast will to live.”</p> <p>The heart transplant was one of a number of pioneering procedures in recent months in which organs from genetically altered pigs were used to replace organs in humans. The process, called xenotransplantation, offers new hope for tens of thousands of patients with ailing kidneys, hearts and other organs, as there is an acute shortage of donated organs.</p> <p>Mr. Bennett’s transplant was initially deemed successful. It is still considered a significant step forward, because the pig’s heart was not immediately rejected and continued to function for well over a month, passing a critical milestone for transplant patients.</p> <p>Some 41,354 Americans received a transplanted organ last year, more than half of them kidneys, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing, a nonprofit that coordinates the nation’s organ procurement efforts.</p>

But there is a dire shortage of organs, and a dozen or more people on waiting lists die each day. About 3,800 Americans received human donor hearts last year as replacements, more than ever before, but demand remains high.

Scientists have been trying to produce pigs whose organs would not be rejected by the human body, a research effort that has picked up steam over the past decade because of new gene editing and cloning technologies.

New York surgeons announced in October that they had successfully attached a kidney grown in a genetically altered pig to a brain-dead human patient, finding that the organ worked normally and produced urine for 54 hours.

In January, surgeons at the University of Alabama at Birmingham reported that they had for the first time successfully transplanted kidneys from a genetically modified pig into the abdomen of a 57-year-old brain-dead man. The kidneys functioned and produced urine for three days.

U.A.B. surgeons said they hoped to launch a small clinical trial with live human patients by the end of the year.

Shortly after Mr. Bennett's heart surgery in January, The Washington Post reported that he had a criminal record stemming from an assault 34 years ago, in which he repeatedly stabbed a young man in a fit of jealousy, leaving him paralyzed.

The victim, Edward Shumaker, spent two decades in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the waist down, and suffered numerous medical complications including a stroke that left him cognitively impaired before he died in 2007 at age 40, according to his sister, Leslie Shumaker Downey, of Frederick, Md.

Mr. Bennett's son, David Bennett Jr., who was a child at the time of the stabbing, has said that he does not want to discuss his father's past, and emphasized that his father was contributing to medical science by undergoing the experimental transplant and hoped to "potentially save patient lives in the future."

The heart given to Mr. Bennett came from a genetically altered pig provided by Revivicor, a regenerative medicine company based in Blacksburg, Va.

The pig carried 10 genetic modifications. Four genes were knocked out, or inactivated, including one that encodes a molecule that causes an aggressive human rejection response.

Another gene was also inactivated to prevent the pig's heart from continuing to grow after it was implanted. In addition, six human genes were inserted into the genome of the donor pig — modifications designed to make the pig's organs more tolerable to the human immune system.

On New Year's Eve, the Food and Drug Administration granted an emergency authorization for the experimental surgery, which was done a week later.

The transplanted heart performed well initially, and there were no signs of rejection for several weeks. Mr. Bennett spent time with his family, did physical therapy and watched the Super Bowl, hospital officials said.

But he was not discharged, and several days ago his condition started to deteriorate, hospital officials said.

His son issued a statement thanking the hospital and staff for their exhaustive efforts on behalf of his father.

"We hope this story can be the beginning of hope and not the end," Mr. Bennett said. "We also hope that what was learned from his surgery will benefit future patients and hopefully one day, end the organ shortage that costs so many lives each year."

HEADLINE	03/09 Experts race to save iconic residents: orcas
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/new-orca-offers-hope-as-experts-race-to-save-pnws-most-iconic-residents
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - In late 2019, Washington published nearly 50 recommendations aimed at steering the Southern Resident killer whales, also known as orcas, away from the brink of extinction.</p> <p>Three groups – or pods – make up the Southern Residents: J, K and L pods. After the recent birth of J-59, the population is believed to be 74 down from the 88 orcas that existed when the group was first listed as an endangered species back in 2005.</p> <p>The orcas face a lot of problems, but three main issues stand out: a lack of prey, noise pollution and contaminants that make it into Puget Sound.</p> <p>TRACKING RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>In the latest update from the state’s tracking, action has been taken on all but two recommendations, the biggest of which was a recommendation to suspend viewing of the Southern Resident orcas. Instead, new rules were created to give the orcas more space.</p> <p>"Not suspending viewing was a choice made by the governor and the legislature at the time," explained Julie Watson, WDFW’s killer whale policy lead. "They said, ‘Let’s take some time looking at these other things and learn and go from there.’"</p> <p>Laws were updated to require vessels stay 300 yards away from the orcas, and at least 400 yards from their paths. A variety of agencies – both state, federal, and bi-national – have also worked to educate people through the "Be Whale Wise" program.</p> <p>More controversial recommendations considered early-on, like breaching the lower Snake River dams, never came to fruition. Instead, a recommendation to establish a stakeholder process to discuss the potential of breaching/removing the dams was made. A final report from the Office of Financial Management reviewing the impacts was released in March 2020, and further discussion has continued.</p> <p>MAJOR CHANGES</p> <p>One of the noticeable changes since the recommendations were made, has been the uptick in hatchery fish being introduced to local streams and rivers.</p> <p>The state, tribes and public utilities received \$13.5 million in 2019 to up hatchery production. According to the Governor’s Salmon Recovery Office, that work will result in an additional 26 million smolts – or young salmon – annually.</p> <p>Since then, the Legislature has approved additional funding to improve facilities, and up production further.</p> <p>"This is the key to keeping everything going," said Brodie Antipa, a hatchery operations manager for Fish & Wildlife during a recent tour of a facility along Soos Creek. "Fisheries, sport, tribal, feeding the orca – it’s all right here, it’s where it starts in the hatchery."</p> <p>Antipa walked FOX 13 around the newly revamped facility this month – not along ago, they raised around 4.2 million smolts in a year. The number has now increased to 6.5 million.</p> <p>It’s a very different process, because the fish they’re raising are an endangered species in their own right. Funding from the state, tribes and federal governments are essentially used to boost an endangered species, that will eventually feed another. It’s one of the only instances of such work taking place anywhere in the U.S.</p>

For those on the ground floor of the work – like Antipa – it’s a reminder that we play a major role in the decrease in iconic Pacific Northwest species. Much like orcas, humans have had an oversized role in the decrease in salmon: population growth has led to habitat destruction, contaminant runoff that transfers from salmon to orca, not to mention our impact on climate.

"If it wasn’t for the hatchery there wouldn’t be much left in this creek," said Antipa. "We’re constantly adapting to change in water quality. During drought years where we get hot water here, it’s not uncommon for us to hit 70 degrees, which is really hard to grow salmon in 70 degree water – so climate change is having an effect on how we do business here. We’re moving more and more fish offsite during the summer time when we’re subject to drought and really hot water."

HABITAT RECOVERY

Hatchery fish aren’t the only success story. Plenty of time, energy and money has been poured into restoring natural salmon runs.

According to Galuska, the legislature is trying to expand the work through various types of funding – like the Recreation and Conservation Office, which has put \$200 million into salmon habitat restoration in the last two years alone.

That said, the challenge isn’t getting easier year-to-year. Population growth and a changing planet are moving the goal posts constantly.

"We’re up against quite a bit with climate change and the growing population in Seattle," she said. "Seattle was the number-one growth city in 2020."

VESSEL NOISE

Ensuring orcas has fish to eat is one thing, but whether they can find the fish is another issue altogether.

The Southern Residents rely on echolocation to hunt. Their abilities are so precise that they can differentiate species of salmon through noise alone, allowing the Southern Residents to target Chinook salmon, their favorite prey.

Orcas essentially send out a series of clicks (an example from NOAA can be found [here](#)). When the sound wave hits an object, it bounces back to a whale, allowing them to detect fish up to 500 feet away. Puget Sound, however, makes that skill difficult as locals and businesses create noise that disrupts the Southern Residents ability to hunt – and new research seems to indicate that females are more likely to give up on prey when their hunting grounds are too noisy.

"We know that female Southern Resident orcas need to find and capture food, so they can meet their nutritional needs both for gestation and lactation," explained Watson. "The fact that they are being disproportionately impacted and are more likely to give up trying to find food when boats are nearby is concerning to us."

Perhaps the biggest change underway in terms of noisy waters, is the launching of [Quiet Sound](#) – a new effort to implement shipping noise-reduction initiatives. The work is just getting off the ground, but the long-term goal is to better understand the acoustics large commercial vessels are creating and how they can best reduce negative effects on orcas hunting.

"The next steps will be coming up with real concepts to quiet the Sound," said Galuska. "Part of that will be technology – through private industry, the maritime industry – and that does take time. It takes time, effort and funding to do all of those things. I think we’ll be looking to that group to see what ideas, and innovations they can come up with."

HOPE FOR FUTURE ORCAS

Despite the challenges, there is a feeling of hope when talking with people who are closest to this work.

	<p>Galuska noted that we have never seen either the resources in terms of money, or the collaboration that we're seeing right now with state, local, tribal governments in addition to federal funding and nonprofits.</p> <p>No one can flip a switch. Orca recovery has a lot of moving parts: salmon recovery, habitat restoration, decreasing vessel noise, reducing contaminants, and doing all of that before an already stressed species is too far gone.</p> <p>Yet, no one seems willing to call it quits.</p> <p>"While you might not see an immediate benefit tomorrow I think we're all in it for the long haul," said Galuska. "We are not going to stop moving forward and having hope that we can recover this endangered species."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Seattle dog walkers among best paid in US
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-among-cities-where-dog-walkers-are-paid-the-most/
GIST	<p>In a city famous for having more pets than children and consistently ranked among the nation's best for dog lovers, it is perhaps no surprise that our dog walkers are among the better paid.</p> <p>The average annual pay for a dog walker in Seattle is \$32,666, making pooch patrollers in Seattle the sixth best paid in the country, according to a new study by 365 Pet Insurance.</p> <p>The study analyzed data by ZIP code to map out where in the country dog walkers have the highest average pay per year.</p> <p>Findings from the study show the top five cities for dog-walking pay are all in California, with Seattle right behind them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • San Francisco, with \$35,226 • Fresno, with \$34,089 • Fremont, with \$34,089 • San Jose, with \$33,981 • Oakland, with \$33,656 • Seattle, with \$32,666. <p>Statewide, Washington dog walkers average just a little over \$30,000. Washington is among the only eight states where dog walkers make over \$30,000 annually on average, the study found.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massachusetts, with \$31,656 • Hawaii, with \$31,203 • Connecticut, with \$30,887 • Wisconsin, with \$30,409 • Tennessee, with \$30,211 • Washington, with \$30,103 • Minnesota, with \$30,095 • Rhode Island, with \$30,028
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HEADLINE	03/09 Officials: 55 tons lettuce starving manatees
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/55-tons-lettuce-fed-floridas-starving-manatees-83343887
GIST	<p>ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- More than 55 tons of lettuce have been fed to starving Florida manatees as part of an experimental program to help the slow-moving marine mammals since their natural food is being destroyed by water pollution, wildlife officials said Wednesday.</p> <p>The lettuce, funded by more than 1,000 individual donations, is offered to manatees that gather in the warm water discharge near a power plant on Florida's east coast as they typically do during cold months.</p>

	<p>Officials from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said in a conference call that the feeding program has made a difference.</p> <p>“That's a substantial amount,” said Ron Mezich, feeding program coordinator for the Florida wildlife commission. “We're not done yet.”</p> <p>The unprecedented feeding response came after a record 1,100 manatees died last year, largely because of starvation. The problem requires a long-term solution because pollution from agriculture, septic tanks, urban runoff and other sources is killing the seagrass on which the marine mammals rely.</p> <p>Through Feb. 25 this year, about 375 confirmed manatee deaths have been recorded. That compares to 389 during the same period last year; both are far above the 136 deaths reported in 2020 during the first two months.</p> <p>More than 80 rescued manatees are currently being cared for at facilities in Florida, Texas, Puerto Rico and Ohio, according to Terri Calleson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Some of those are abandoned calves that typically take longer to recover.</p> <p>Florida legislators last year provided \$8 million for several seagrass restoration projects that will get off the ground this year, officials said. But it won't be an immediate solution.</p> <p>“We're not solving the seagrass issue in a year,” said Tom Reinert of the Florida wildlife commission.</p> <p>There are currently about 7,500 manatees, also known as sea cows, living in Florida waters. They are listed federally as a threatened species, although there are efforts to give them the heightened endangered designation.</p> <p>The approach of warmer weather means manatees will disperse to areas where food is more plentiful, officials said.</p> <p>“It's warming up, and that's a good thing for manatees. They'll be moving on,” Reinert said.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	03/10 UK: Russia commanders face war crimes
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/uk-says-russian-commanders-will-be-held-account-war-crimes-2022-03-10/
GIST	<p>LONDON, March 10 (Reuters) - Russian military commanders as well as people at the very top of the Russian government will be held to account for any war crimes in Ukraine, Britain's armed forces minister said on Thursday.</p> <p>"Russian commanders need to remember that war crimes are not just committed by those at the very top of the Russian government," James Heapey told Sky News.</p> <p>"They are committed all the way down the chain of command by all who are involved and these atrocities are being watched, they're being catalogued and people will be held to account."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Hate groups decline; not incidents of hate
SOURCE	https://www.cbs19news.com/story/46037788/slpc-releases-annual-report-on-hate-and-extremism

GIST	<p>MONTGOMERY, Ala. (CBS19 NEWS) -- The Southern Poverty Law Center says the number of documented active hate and extremist groups has declined for a third year, but the instances of hate and extremism have not.</p> <p>The SPLC released its <i>The Year in Hate and Extremism 2021</i> report on Wednesday.</p> <p>According to a release, this report finds that hate and antigovernment extremism have gone mainstream, hitting the national and political dialogue.</p> <p>In 2021, there were 733 hate and 488 anti-government groups identified as being active across the country.</p> <p>This was down from 838 and 566 such groups that were documented in 2020.</p> <p>However, the SPLC says hate and extremism have “coalesced into a broader movement that is both threatening our democracy at the community level and embracing violence as a means to achieve white supremacist goals.”</p> <p>The report also finds that the threat posed by such extremist activity has grown.</p> <p>“Our nation stands at a dangerous crossroad. The mainstreaming of hate and extremism threatens our people, our communities, our education system and democracy itself,” said Susan Corke, Director of the SPLC’s Intelligence Project. “The Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol was the culmination of years of right-wing radicalization. The attempt to rewrite the history of that day and evade accountability for the violence shows the gravity of the problem and the urgency of addressing it.”</p> <p>The release says the report offers policy recommendations that aim to defend and strengthen the democratic institutions of the United States.</p> <p>These include enforcing current laws against private militias and political intimidation, protecting the right to vote, improving government coordination and response to domestic extremism, and confronting white supremacy and extremism among active-duty military and veterans.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 New Zealand: 90,000 CSAM trade accounts
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/new-zealand-identifies-90k-csam/
GIST	<p>A lengthy investigation into the online trade of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) has led to the arrest of dozens of individuals based in New Zealand.</p> <p>Led by New Zealand’s Te Tari Taiwhenua Department of Internal Affairs (DIA), the two-year international operation identified more than 90,000 online accounts that possessed or traded CSAM.</p> <p>DIA’s Digital Child Exploitation Team launched Operation H in October 2019 following a tip-off from an electronic service provider who discovered that tens of thousands of offenders were using their platform to share CSAM.</p> <p>The DIA brought on board international law enforcement agencies, including INTERPOL, to assist and coordinate what officials have described as “the largest and most challenging online child exploitation operation led out of New Zealand.”</p> <p>Operation H uncovered a global network of secret CSAM online traders. As a result of the action, 836 cases were investigated internationally, 46 New Zealand residents were arrested and 146 children worldwide were safeguarded, including four in the US.</p>

	<p>More than 100 suspects were identified across the European Union. In two of the cases, the suspects were offenders based in Austria and Hungary who were abusing their own children, aged six and eight years old, respectively. Both children were subsequently safeguarded.</p> <p>In Spain, a suspect was caught possessing and disseminating CSAM and capturing nude and sexually explicit images of adults on video without their consent.</p> <p>Investigators found 32GB of files, the equivalent of 90 minutes of video. Europol described the contents of the files as “particularly disturbing child abuse images, including imagery depicting sadistic acts of sexual abuse of infants and children.”</p> <p>Tim Houston, manager of digital child exploitation team and lead for Operation H, said: “This operation will have an impact on the global networks that deal in the most horrific and damaging material, and we are extraordinarily proud of the effect it will have on children’s lives around the world.”</p> <p>Thanks to the investigation, INTERPOL was able to expand its database of CSAM relating to more than 27,700 identified victims and some 12,500 offenders worldwide, potentially aiding in the future identification of additional victims and offenders.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Interpol: artifacts seized in 28 countries
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/thousands-of-priceless-artefacts-seized-in-police-operation-across-28-countries
GIST	<p>Priceless artefacts, including ancient coins, paintings, furniture, musical instruments and statuettes, have been seized in a four-month police operation across 28 countries.</p> <p>More than 9,400 items were recovered and 52 people arrested in an operation targeting illicit trafficking in cultural goods, carried out between June and September last year, Interpol said on Wednesday.</p> <p>More than 170 investigations are ongoing, with more seizures and arrests expected as investigators “continue their pursuit of those spoiling and destroying cultural heritage”, the international criminal police operation said.</p> <p>Operation Pandora VI, led by Spain, involved actions in airports and at border crossing points, as well as in auction houses, museums and private homes. Online markets were monitored for suspicious sales.</p> <p>French customs officials seized 4,231 archaeological objects, including about 3,000 coins, as well as bells, buckles, rings and pieces of pottery that had been looted from archaeological sites by an individual using a metal detector.</p> <p>Separately, they recovered three ancient statuettes dating back to La Tolita-Tumaco culture, whose people inhabited the area along the present-day border between Colombia and Ecuador in the first millennium AD.</p> <p>Spanish police seized 91 Roman gold coins, looted from an archaeological site and worth an estimated half a million euros on the black market. Their investigation began when the coins were spotted at an auction house in Madrid.</p> <p>US customs and border protection officials recovered a shipment containing 13 Mexican artefacts from the post-classic to the Aztec era, including a skull and 12 adzes, a cutting tool.</p> <p>A 13th century processional cross was returned to the Evangelical Church Museum of Călnădie, Romania.</p> <p>Meanwhile, police in the Netherlands recovered two Kees Verweij paintings that had been reported as stolen, after investigating an online sales catalogue from an Amsterdam auction house.</p>

	<p>A marble column dating from the Roman period, and 13 ancient coins and three pottery vessels dating from the Hellenistic period, were seized by Greek police.</p> <p>Seven European law enforcement authorities recovered 90 metal detectors destined for illicit use at archaeological sites.</p> <p>Operation Pandora, coordinated by Europol, Interpol and the World Customs Organisation, has resulted in the recovery of 147,050 cultural artefacts and the arrest of 407 people since it was launched in 2016.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Mexican women protest femicides
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/world/americas/mexico-women-femicides.html
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY — An International Women’s Day rally in Mexico on Tuesday drew thousands of protesters, with throngs marching against violence and streaming past the presidential palace and national monuments in the capital that had been cordoned off with huge metal fences amid fears of unrest.</p> <p>President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has been accused of not doing enough to stem the rise in femicides, urged calm while warning that the protests could turn violent.</p> <p>The Mexico City police said they had seized Molotov cocktails, weapons such as bats and hammers and fireworks from protesters in the afternoon. Local news media reported that two protesters had been injured after swinging at a glass bus stop, which came crashing down on top of them.</p> <p>The authorities had erected a protective metal barrier around the National Palace, the seat of government where the presidential family lives, and other historic buildings ahead of the protests.</p> <p>Later Tuesday night, video footage shared online showed a blaze at the door of the government palace in Monterrey, the capital of Nuevo León state, after marchers entered the building, according to local news reports. There was no immediate official confirmation of any damage. Anti-riot police officers and firefighters were deployed to the site.</p> <p>Protesters wrote, “MEXICO FEMICIDE” in towering white letters on the black metal cordon in front of the National Palace, which faces the Zocalo main square, the stage for many major demonstrations.</p> <p>Last year, women marching on International Women’s Day also clashed with the police at barricades surrounding the National Palace. Protesters attempted to tear down a metal wall installed to protect government property from vandalism, prompting officers to fire pepper spray.</p> <p>Mexico recorded 969 femicides last year, up slightly from 949 in 2020, according to government figures. Activists say the true figures are most likely much higher, and some estimate that 10 women a day are killed because of their gender.</p> <p>A group of protesters chanted, “Women united, will never be defeated,” as they arrived near the National Palace on Tuesday, waving white flags. Others, wearing purple bandanas for the region’s feminist movement or green in support of abortion rights, marched down one of Mexico City’s main avenues holding banners and posters with feminist slogans.</p> <p>Frida Moreno, 21, a student who said that abusive teachers had scarred her upbringing, said she believed she had a duty to march so that other young girls would be spared similar experiences.</p> <p>“Although I feel privileged because I live in a safe area, no one can guarantee that one day I will not disappear,” said Ms. Moreno, on the verge of tears.</p> <p>Mr. López Obrador, who appointed women to half his cabinet posts, has rejected claims by activists that he is not interested in tackling femicides, saying that progress has been made to defend women’s rights.</p>

Asked on Tuesday morning if the protests could become violent, as one government official had predicted, the president nodded.

"There is infiltration of the feminist movement in general by conservative groups," he said, noting that it was wrong "to use violence for political purposes."

The Mexico City government had said it would deploy dozens of paramedics as well as an all-female police force.

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HEADLINE	03/09 Prosecuting habitual offenders in Seattle
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/slow-changes-to-prosecuting-habitual-offenders-in-seattle
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Over the last several months, changes made in prosecuting habitual offenders in Seattle seem to be having an effect. These changes come after a 2019 report on Seattle's criminal justice system, which was critical of the city prosecutor and the municipal court system in its handling of habitual offenders.</p> <p>In the two-part 'System Failure' report, the first report detailed how repeat offenders racked up arrests, warrants and even jail time only to end up back on the street to re-offend. The second report released months later explored how some misdemeanor or other lower-level criminals never see the inside of a courtroom.</p> <p>The changes between 2019 and now have been slow, but still happening. The difference appears to be a coordinated effort between city, county and federal prosecutors and law enforcement.</p> <p>Last month, newly-appointed U.S. Attorney for Western Washington, Nick Brown, renewed a focus on Seattle street crime that involved habitual offenders arrested with weapons and dealing drugs.</p> <p>"If it involves gun trafficking, gun possession by people who are illegally possessing guns or the combination of drugs or guns, it's going to get our attention," Brown said during a press conference on Friday, where he announced a coordinated effort to prosecute street criminals in Seattle.</p> <p>By charging habitual offenders with federal crimes rather than misdemeanor crimes, defendants face longer prison sentences and won't face what critics have called "soft judges" in the Seattle criminal justice systems.</p> <p>"Our deputies proceeded to court every day and urged the court to ensure these individuals were held, making the argument that immediate release would send the wrong message," said Leesa Manion, the King County Prosecutor's Office Chief of Staff at Friday's press briefing.</p> <p>She says the King County Prosecutor's Office is working with the Seattle City Attorney to aggregate misdemeanor cases involving habitual offenders into larger felony cases with potential longer jail time.</p> <p>"At the Prosecutor's Office, we have the High-Priority Repeat Offender Group," said the office's spokesperson, Casey McNerthney.</p> <p>John Lomax, for example, is one of those people, McNerthney explained.</p> <p>Lomax is now famous for being seen wheeling out a 70-inch TV through the downtown Seattle Target store, unabated, before he was eventually arrested by Seattle Police. He is accused of stealing from that same Target 22 times in the past.</p> <p>"We are addressing multiple misdemeanor crimes, aggregating the value of loss and aggregating the number of crimes to make those felony cases whenever possible" Manion said.</p>

	Newly elected Seattle City Attorney Ann Davison is expected to release a report soon, outlining how her office is addressing habitual offenders and the impact those cases are having Seattle Municipal Court.
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HEADLINE	03/09 PCSO arrests two serial robbery suspects
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/sherriffs-dept-arrests-two-men-believed-to-be-involved-in-over-two-dozen-armed-robberies
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — The Pierce County Sheriff's Department arrested two serial robbery suspects who they say have been charged in connection to 14 armed robberies throughout Gig Harbor, Tacoma, Spanaway and Graham over the past six months. Investigators say they could be connected to ten more.</p> <p>Detectives said the pair — a 28-year-old male and 30-year-old male-targeted restaurants and retail businesses, occasionally robbing the same businesses multiple times.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Pierce County Prosecutors charged 29-year-old Tyrone Anthony Prophet Jr. with six counts of robbery in the first degree. A judge set his bail at \$500,000. Arthur Dukes, 30, was charged with ten counts of robbery in the first degree. He has not yet been arraigned.</p> <p>The joint investigation, conducted alongside the Tacoma Police Department, the Gig Harbor Police Department and South Sound 911, is ongoing. Detectives are working to determine whether the suspects are responsible for additional robberies.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Everett police arrest 'Bouldering Bandit'
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/everett-police-arrest-suspect-connected-16-robberies/MKWV3KLLVJGR3DZ4Y6VHES6AHY/
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. — Dramatic surveillance video shows how a burglar broke in, and then squeezed into, several businesses in downtown Everett.</p> <p>Police said the suspect admitted to burglarizing at least 16 businesses.</p> <p>Many of the cases happened along Colby Avenue near Everett Avenue, including Britney Barber's improvement shop.</p> <p>"He got in the shop so smoothly, except when he got his leg caught on the glass panel, which was hilarious," she noted.</p> <p>As seen on security footage, the crook's ability to climb and squeeze his way into tiny spaces has given him quite the nickname: "The Bouldering Bandit!"</p> <p>Barber said she believed the suspect is as capable of climbing up giant boulders, as he is at squeezing through tiny windows.</p> <p>Everett police tell KIRO 7 "The Bouldering Bandit" broke into many shops by crawling through incredibly small openings.</p> <p>They believe he burglarized not only Barber's store, but restaurants and even a beauty shop.</p> <p>"He actually staged my safe by the door, walked home, came back 25 minutes later — walked right in, picked up the safe and walked out," Barber said.</p> <p>It was footage from Barber's store that gave police a description of the suspect.</p> <p>A few days ago, patrol officers say they literally spotted him walking down the street, wearing his favorite break-in clothes.</p>

	“He was almost asking to get caught,” joked Barber. “Who tucks a sweatshirt into a studded pair of jeans? The Bouldering Bandit does!”
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HEADLINE	03/09 Police warn of potential increase gas thefts
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/everett/everett-police-gas-thefts-prices/281-84ca2b3f-0861-4c63-8be0-22d97733cbe4
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. — The Everett Police Department is warning residents of a potential increase in gas thefts.</p> <p>At least seven gas thefts have been reported in the past six months.</p> <p>Some gas thieves are using rubber hoses to siphon the fuel out while others are using power tools to drill holes in gas tanks, Everett police said Tuesday.</p> <p>The Everett Police Department is advising residents to park their vehicles in well-lit areas or in garages to deter thieves.</p> <p>"We have recently seen some thieves who use a drill to drill through people's gas tanks and siphon off the fuel that way, and historically when gas prices go up, we see more siphoning of gas," said Everett Police Officer Kerby Duncan.</p> <p>Duncan said two vans recently had their tanks emptied overnight at a healthcare facility on the 2000 block of Broadway Avenue. Police are aware of seven such thefts in the last six months in Everett.</p> <p>"It's not a huge problem yet, but with rising fuel prices, we just want people to be aware of it," Duncan said.</p> <p>Gary Wood, a manager at Bucky's Complete Auto Repair in Everett, said catalytic converter replacements remain a persistent problem among customers but he is aware of gas thefts too. Wood said it could cost approximately \$2,000 replace a gas tank.</p> <p>"Nobody wants to pay two thousand dollars on top of high gas prices. I mean, the thieves think they're getting off because they're saving a few bucks on gas but really they're costing people thousands and thousands of dollars," Wood said.</p> <p>Other communities in western Washington are also reporting gas theft.</p> <p>The Lacey Police Department is asking for the public's help in identifying a suspect connected to siphoning gas out of a vehicle Monday.</p> <p>The suspect was seen siphoning gas out of a minivan on surveillance video at the Lacey Veterans Service HUB, according to the Lacey Police Department.</p> <p>Gas prices hit an average of \$4.79 Wednesday in the Seattle-Bellevue-Everett area and an average of \$4.63 statewide, according to AAA. Nationally, a gallon of gas costs about \$4.25 Wednesday according to data from AAA, the highest it's been since 2014, as the country was pulling out of the 2008 recession.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Auburn man 7th criminal charge Capitol riot
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/auburn-area-proud-boys-leader-charged-with-seventh-criminal-count-in-u-s-capitol-attack/

GIST	<p>An Auburn-area man among a group of Proud Boys leaders accused of orchestrating last year's attack on the U.S. Capitol has been charged with yet another criminal count under a federal indictment unsealed this week.</p> <p>Ethan Nordean, 31, who already was charged and detained on six criminal counts pending trial for his alleged role in the Jan. 6, 2021, siege, now faces a seventh count for "assaulting, resisting impeding certain officers."</p> <p>The new charge against Nordean was detailed in a 30-page indictment unsealed Tuesday that primarily lays out seven new criminal counts against Henry "Enrique" Tarrio, the Proud Boys' former national chairman.</p> <p>The indictment alleges that, in the weeks leading up to the Capitol breach, Tarrio created a special chapter of the Proud Boys known as the "Ministry of Self Defense" to plan the attack aimed to thwart Congress from certifying the 2020 presidential election results. The group allegedly included Nordean and four other prominent members of the extremist group who already were co-defendants facing multiple federal criminal counts in the case.</p> <p>Two days before the Capitol siege, Tarrio was arrested on a warrant for destroying a Black Lives Matter banner during a previous Washington, D.C. demonstration. As a condition of his release on Jan. 5, 2021, he was ordered to stay out of the District of Columbia and missed the pro-Trump "Stop the Steal" rally and attack on the Capitol.</p> <p>"Although Tarrio is not accused of physically taking part in the breach of the Capitol, the indictment alleges that he led the advance planning and remained in contact with other members of the Proud Boys during their breach of the Capitol," according to a press statement issued by the U.S. Attorney's Office in the District of Columbia.</p> <p>Among other actions, Tarrio allegedly continued to direct and encourage the Proud Boys prior to and during the events of Jan. 6, the indictment states. He also claimed credit for what had happened on social media and in an encrypted chat room during and after the attack, it says.</p> <p>Tarrio, 38, was arrested Tuesday in Miami. He and Nordean, along with Joseph Biggs, 38, of Florida; Zachary Rehl, 36, of Pennsylvania; and Charles Donohoe, 34, of North Carolina; face seven criminal counts, including conspiracy. A sixth member of the group, Dominic Pezzola, 44, of New York, faces eight criminal counts, including an additional charge of robbery of personal property of the United States.</p> <p>Nordean, who is being held at the Federal Detention Center in SeaTac, has pleaded not guilty, as have all of his co-defendants.</p> <p>Nordean is among at least a dozen current or former Washington residents who have been charged in connection with the Capitol attack. In all, more than 775 individuals have been arrested in nearly all 50 states for crimes related to the breach, according to the Department of Justice.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Jury: man guilty Yakama 2019 mass killings
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/james-cloud-found-guilty-of-2019-mass-murder-on-yakama-reservation/
GIST	<p>SPOKANE — A jury on Wednesday found James Dean Cloud guilty of several counts of first-degree murder, kidnapping and carjacking in a 2019 mass homicide that shook the Yakama Reservation.</p> <p>John Cagle, 59; Michelle Starnes, 51; Catherine Eneas, 49; Thomas Hernandez, 36; and Dennis Overacker, 61, all were shot to death June 8, 2019, at a Medicine Valley trailer just west of White Swan.</p>

James Cloud and Donovan Quinn Carter Cloud are accused of the killings and were charged in U.S. District Court with murder, attempted murder, kidnapping, assault with a deadly weapon and brandishing a firearm with intent to commit bodily injury.

Donovan Cloud, who was supposed to be tried after James Cloud, entered a guilty plea Wednesday to carjacking and brandishing a firearm.

Jurors in James Cloud's trial spent more than a week listening to testimony that sometimes conflicted. They also reviewed evidence and saw gruesome photos of the scene before going into deliberations Tuesday afternoon. They came to a verdict just after 9 a.m. Wednesday.

Frowns crept across the faces of defense attorneys and concern flashed in James Cloud's eyes as the verdict was read into record.

The Clouds will be sentenced July 26 in Yakima. James Cloud faces a potential life sentence. Donovan Cloud faces 22-27 years in custody under the federal sentencing guidelines, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

The jury found James Cloud guilty on four counts of first-degree murder in the shooting deaths of Starnes, Eneas, Overacker and Hernandez.

The jury also found him guilty of kidnapping, carjacking, assault and brandishing a firearm while committing a crime.

He and Donovan Cloud had been accused of going to family's home and holding a gun to a boy's head while demanding a vehicle to flee the area. They were also accused of taking the boy, who managed to escape, according to testimony.

The jury found him not guilty of second-degree murder in Cagle's death. Cagle's body was found in a game room near but separate from the trailer.

Prosecutors said a dispute in the game room resulted in James Cloud shooting and killing Cagle, and then going on a killing spree.

The Clouds weren't alone when the killings occurred. Natasha Mae Jackson and her uncle, Morris Bruce Jackson, were with them.

Prosecutors said the Clouds picked up the Jacksons en route to Lyle, a small Columbia River community south of Goldendale, and stopped by Cagle's so Morris Jackson could buy some meth.

Then the Clouds became aggressive, entered Cagle's property with guns strapped over their shoulders and went on a shooting rampage, prosecutors said.

The defense said Jackson, who testified that he saw James Cloud shoot and kill Hernandez after admitting to killing Cagle, had more to do with the violence that unfolded that day than he acknowledged.

They claimed that James Cloud attempted to calm Donovan Cloud, whom witnesses said wanted to kill everyone in a pickup that arrived after the initial shootings.

Defense attorneys argued that Donovan Cloud and Jackson were responsible for the shootings that day. They pointed to one of the surviving victim's statements identifying Jackson as the one who shot at the pickup with a shotgun.

Natasha Mae Jackson also confirmed her earlier statements to investigators that it was her uncle who shot at the pickup.

	<p>Overacker, Hernandez, Lindell LaFollette and Esmeralda Zaragoza were in the pickup that arrived after the first shootings. They were there to visit Cagle.</p> <p>Hernandez was shot to death outside the pickup. Overacker was in the driver's seat when he was shot and killed. LaFollette and Zaragoza were shot as well but survived.</p> <p>Morris Jackson was charged with being a felon in possession of a firearm. He said he was able to take possession of a .22-caliber rifle from James Cloud after the shootings and later tossed it in a canal.</p> <p>He entered a plea agreement that shields him from any charges related to events that occurred at Cagle's trailer.</p> <p>The Clouds' trials were moved to Spokane due to extensive media coverage of the case in Yakima.</p> <p>The killings occurred over the same weekend the Yakama Nation held its annual commemoration of its 1855 treaty with the federal government.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/09 Kitsap investigators solve 1995 homicide
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/community/gateway/g-news/article259236015.html
GIST	<p>Patricia Lorraine Barnes' body was found in an Olalla ditch in 1995, and her homicide remained unsolved for decades.</p> <p>A Kitsap County detective was able to call the 61-year-old woman's family Monday to say investigators had solved it.</p> <p>"They were very relieved to have some resolution to her death," Sheriff John Gese said at a news conference Wednesday.</p> <p>The case is one of about 15 the Sheriff's Office has looked into as part of the agency's push in 2018 to solve cold cases.</p> <p>Several have been solved.</p> <p>Barnes lived in Seattle and was last seen there Aug. 22, 1995. Her body was found three days later. She'd been fatally shot in the head and left naked, covered by a sleeping bag, in the 15000 block of Peacock Hill Road Southeast.</p> <p>Serial killer Robert Lee Yates was a person of interest in Barnes' death, but he was excluded as a suspect a couple years ago, investigators said.</p> <p>The state Attorney General's Office and Spokane police and sheriff's investigators helped. They figured out Yates was at Fort Rucker, Alabama when Barnes was killed. Because he was in the military, there was a lot of information investigators used to compile a timeline of his whereabouts, Kitsap County detective Mike Grant said at the news conference.</p> <p>The man they believe killed Barnes is Douglas Keith Krohne, who would have been 33 at the time. He died in 2016 in Nogales, Arizona after he was electrocuted while installing some sort of TV antenna that hit power lines, investigators said.</p> <p>Krohne and Barnes did not have connections to Kitsap County, investigators said, and it's not clear how they met. Grant said he gathers that Barnes was an outgoing person who befriended people easily.</p> <p>Krohne used to live in Seattle and Tacoma and had five felony convictions in Washington, including for first-degree robbery, investigators said. At some point there was a court order out of Pierce County for his DNA to be collected, but it never happened, Grant said.</p>

That was frustrating at the start of their investigation, he said. Now, his DNA will be added to CODIS, the national Combined DNA Index System.

HOW IT WAS SOLVED

Following the department's focus on cold cases in April 2018, investigators took another look at physical evidence in Barnes' homicide. They interviewed detectives who originally handled the case, went over photos of the scene and sent evidence for DNA testing.

That evidence went to the Washington State Patrol Crime Lab and two private labs out-of-state.

Eventually, DNA from three places at the scene was identified as coming from the same, unidentified man. There wasn't a match in CODIS.

One of the private facilities, Othram Labs in Texas, used forensic genome sequencing and forensic genetic genealogy. That's where investigators try to identify a suspect by searching genealogical databases for relatives.

Dec. 22, 2021, the lab gave detectives a name. Investigators talked to police in Nogales and with the medical examiner in Tuscon, Arizona, learned Krohne had died.

They then sent his DNA to the Washington State Patrol Crime Lab. On Feb. 7, that DNA was reported to be a match to the unknown DNA from the scene.

Monday, Grant called Barnes' family.

"The plan was to only contact them after it was solved," he told reporters.

He described the response as shocked and grateful.

In way, he said, the case was solved in 1995. It's the work of now-retired investigators who handled the original investigation that solved it.

An artist's rendering at the time of a person interest last seen with Barnes was next to a photo of Krohne at the press conference. They're remarkably similar.

The success "belongs to the initial investigative response by the detectives in 1995," the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office said in a news release: "The success of modern investigative methods can only occur when built upon a thorough and professional foundation of police work. Their work is reflected in their exhaustive follow up, countless interviews, vetting of tips, collaboration with numerous law enforcement agencies, evidence collection, crime scene processing and a relentless seeking of the truth for the sake of the victim and the victim's family."

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HEADLINE	03/09 Honduras: ex-national police chief arrest
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/honduran-national-police-chief-wanted-us-arrested-83352978
GIST	<p>TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras -- A former head of Honduras' national police who was sought by U.S. prosecutors on drug and weapons charges was arrested Wednesday, according to the government.</p> <p>Juan Carlos Bonilla Valladares served as the country's top police official in 2012 and 2013. Better known as "El Tigre," or "The Tiger," Bonilla faced allegations of human rights abuses during his time in command.</p> <p>Security Minister Ramón Sabillón confirmed Bonilla's arrest Wednesday afternoon at a toll plaza on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa.</p>

A high-ranking police official, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the arrest, said Bonilla had been under surveillance by a police intelligence unit. The official said the arrest came in response to a U.S. extradition request.

The United States requested Bonilla's arrest and extradition in May of last year on drug and weapons charges. Prosecutors labeled him a co-conspirator of former President Juan Orlando Hernández and the president's brother Tony Hernández. The case has developed over years in the Southern District of New York.

A spokeswoman from the U.S. Attorney's Office declined to comment.

Former President Hernández is currently awaiting a determination of a Honduras judge on a U.S. extradition request also from the Southern District of New York on drug trafficking and weapons charges.

U.S. prosecutors in Manhattan announced charges against Bonilla in April 2020, alleging that he used his law enforcement clout to protect U.S.-bound shipments of cocaine. Bonilla denied at the time being a drug trafficker.

He said then he would go wherever necessary to prove the accusations untrue and suggested drug traffickers were behind the accusations. He held up his long cooperation with the U.S. State Department as proof he was someone the U.S. government trusted.

Then Manhattan U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman said at the time that Bonilla played a key role in a violent international drug conspiracy, working on behalf of former Honduran Congressman Tony Hernández Alvarado and his brother, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández.

"Bonilla Valladares oversaw the transshipment of multi-ton loads of cocaine bound for the U.S., used machine guns and other weaponry to accomplish that, and participated in extreme violence, including the murder of a rival trafficker," Berman said in a statement in 2020.

Bonilla was named head of Honduras' National Police in May 2012 by President Porfirio Lobo, through December 2013. He was removed when Hernández took over as president.

Prosecutors have said Bonilla let drug shipments pass through police checkpoints without inspection and gave drug organizations information about police aerial and maritime interdiction operations so they could evade them.

An internal police report in Honduras once accused Bonilla of leading death squads and participating in three killings or forced disappearances between 1998 and 2002. He was prosecuted for one murder but was acquitted in 2004.

Late Wednesday, Bonilla, like the former president, was led before cameras shackled at the wrists and ankles. He wore a black track suit and baseball cap.

He was to spend the night in the same National Police special forces base where Hernández is being held. Bonilla was scheduled to make an initial appearance in the Supreme Court of Justice on Thursday to have the charges read to him.

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